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THE

MOURNER IN ZION

COMFORTED.

BY

WILLIAM HAMILTON, D.D.

Minister of Strathblane, Scotland.

REVISED AND IMPROVED, FROM THE SECOND EDINBURGH EDITION,

BY THE

AUTHOR OF THE COMFORTER.

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.—John xiv. 27.

PITTSBURGH:

PUBLISHED BY COOK AND SCHOYER,

JOHNSTON AND STOCKTON;—COREY AND FAIRBANK, CINCINNATI;
MAXWELL, COOK AND CO., LOUISVILLE.

1834.

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PREFACE.

"LIGHT is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The God of love has lavished on them all the riches of his grace, and furnished them with the noblest blessings and the most inexhaustible sources of consolation. For them he has delivered up his own Son to death, and provided a salvation containing all that a guilty immortal can need for his present safety and happiness, and for his future and everlasting welfare. For them an eternity of honour and delight is spreading its glory before them; and they are invited just now to enter into rest; and till they see him as he is, to walk in the light of his countenance, to go on their way rejoicing, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

"From various causes, however, many of the best of

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men, whose souls are most thoroughly exercised unto godliness, live far below their privileges; and are, for long periods, and some for the greater part of their lives, destitute of that peace and comfort which the Gospel so amply discloses; and which, by the blessing of God, more enlarged and enlightened views of its nature would enable them to entertain. Whilst the careless and hardened, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever, are living in ease and feasting themselves without fear; many of the dearest of God's children, who shall soon reign with Christ in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness, are walking in darkness without light, going mourning without the sun, or suffering his terrors and distracted.

"To the afflicted pity should be shown. But no sufferers have stronger claims upon our sympathy and kindness, than those who are in trouble on account of the state of their souls before God. It is at once the most painful distress which any in this world can sustain; and at the same time there is none which we have greater encouragement to undertake to remedy. The provisions of the Gospel are so full, various, and comprehensive,

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that there is no perplexity, despondence, or alarm, under which a spiritually-minded person can labour, which they are not fitted to remove: and if they fail to afford immediate and complete relief, the fault must lie either in the unskilful manner in which they are administered, or in the patient's refusal to receive them. In itself the antidote is infallible, and the depression which believers experience generally arises from defective views of the glorious Gospel, or a partial reception of its health-giving and joy-creating discoveries.

"The following volume is intended as a contribution to the removal of some of those causes of spiritual dejection, which frequently occur. And if the principles contained in it, are cordially embraced, the *Mourner in Zion* shall, before many years, be ushered in the full blaze of celestial light and the unbounded possession of eternal bliss. With such a prospect before us, let us in the meantime strive to do honour to his generosity and truth, by relying on his promises, living near him, applying and using the riches of his grace, and endeavouring more and more to promote his interest and honour. This will connect earth with heaven, and the

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toils and trials of time with the peace and triumphs of immortality.

"And if any who are strangers to the renewing of the Holy Ghost shall look into this publication, let them remember that the matters which are here discussed are not vain things. They are inseparably connected with the safety of the soul. The day is not far distant when you also shall discover, that the possession of the whole universe is not to be compared with an interest in the righteousness of Immanuel: and if you despise, or neglect it now, you are preparing for yourselves an amount of wretchedness and horror, before which all the sufferings of time shrink into insignificance; of wretchedness and horror too great for the powers of human utterance, and which endless ages of lamentation and mourning will neither repair nor diminish. For what will it profit you to gain the whole world and lose your own soul? or what can you give in exchange for your soul? Consider what I say: and the Lord give you understanding to know, in this the accepted time and day of visitation, the things which belong to your everlasting peace."

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Go forth, little Volume, in the name of the Great Comforter of souls, comfort all that mourn, give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Pittsburgh, January, 1834.

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CHAPTER I.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS JOY.

"Let pure devotion in my heart
For ever dwell, thou God of love;
And light and heavenly peace impart,
Sweet earnests of the joys above."

MAN is born to trouble, and Christians are not exempted from the ordinary calamities and sorrows of humanity. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Though their hopes are high, and they know that, when they reach their home, they shall find their inheritance to be invaluable and immense; while they are in the house of their pilgrimage, they experience much to disturb their peace, and to exercise their faith, fortitude, and patience. Their faculties are limited and feeble; their graces are imperfect; their understandings are only partially enlightened; their hearts are deceitful; their bodies are frail; they are placed in a wicked and ensnaring world; surrounded with manifold temptations; and exposed to severe and complicated trials. They cannot always do the things that they ought, nor even the things that they would. When they would do good, evil is present with them: they feel a law in their members warring against the law in their minds; and are burdened with a body of sin and death.

Though, therefore, it is the duty of all who are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, to be strong in the Lord, to glory in his love, to rejoice alway; there are seasons when this joy becomes unattainable, and when their souls are filled with distress and anguish. Is it possible, or proper, to rejoice when God forsakes them, and

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the consolations of the Gospel are withdrawn? Can they rejoice in the weakness of their faith, and in the languor of their love? in the wanderings of their affections, and the coldness of their hearts? in their distance from God, and faint and indistinct views of his glory? Are they to rejoice in the dishonors which the profane are heaping upon his blessed name, and the awful amount of wrath which they are treasuring up for themselves against the day of wrath? Are they to rejoice when they are beset with temptation, or are actually overtaken with iniquity?

These are circumstances which call for weeping, and lamentation, and mourning.

But, at the same time, every believer ought to be on his guard against the presence and the power of these evils; to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free; and to give all diligence to increase his joy in the Lord, and to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ; and he is graciously calling us into his eternal glory, through a life of faith upon his Son, and of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Many indeed entertain the most base and dishonourable ideas of the blessed Gospel, and of the adorable God who gave it. They suppose that Christianity is a severe and gloomy system, that crushes the spirits of those who embrace it, and subjects them to a life of perpetual toil and unenlivened sadness. They imagine that God is a harsh and rigorous master; who wrings from the hard hands of his people the utmost measure of service which they can render, and in return furnishes them with the most scanty and miserable supplies. They seem to apprehend that he would be alarmed and offended were they to discover any symptoms of liveliness and joy; that he has called them to bondage and suffering; and that, though in heaven they shall be permitted to spend their existence in happiness and bliss, they must pass the time of their sojourning in perplexity and pain, and serve him with slavish despondency and overwhelming terror.

But do these ideas correspond at all with the character of that God, who is the Father of mercies and the God of

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love? of that God who takes pleasure in his people, and rejoices in the prosperity of his saints? After he has so loved the world that he has given his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life; after he has sent down the Holy Ghost to lead us into all truth, to shed abroad his love in our hearts, to bear witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God, and fill us with all peace and joy in believing; is it credible that he can have any delight in our fears and troubles, or any desire to prolong our sufferings, or multiply our sorrows?

When we hear the advent of Jesus celebrated as a cause of exultation and of gladness; when we hear the prophet crying, "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel;" when we find the faithful longing for his appearing as the consolation of Israel; and the celestial inhabitants clustering around the place of his birth, and singing, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will to men;" when we hear the Son of God himself declaring, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,—to comfort all that mourn;" when we hear him opening his mouth in blessings, and inviting all the labouring and heavy laden to come to him for rest; is it credible, is it possible, that he can have any wish to lengthen out the sadness of his children, or to involve them in deeper affliction and distress?

When he has enjoined his ministers to comfort his people; to strengthen the weak hands; to confirm the feeble knees; to say to them of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not, for your God will come and save you; what other inference can we draw from these precious facts, than that he loves the peace and felicity of his followers, and is delighted with their serenity and cheerfulness? Unless he is set upon our welfare, and solicitous to ad

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vance our present happiness and improvement; why has he given us all things richly to enjoy! why has he crowded into the promises of his word, and the provisions of his grace, such an inexhaustible fund of hope and rejoicing? why has it pleased him that in Christ should all fulness dwell; and that out of his fulness we should receive even grace for grace?

When the brief pilgrimage of life is closed, he has prepared a heaven of purity and of bliss; where his servants shall see his face; where they shall serve him day and night, and spend the long range of their eternity in one uninterrupted jubilee. In his presence is fulness of joy; at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore. But who are they who are counted worthy to obtain a part in these exalted services, and in these ineffable and never-ending triumphs? Are they the angels of light? the tenants of other worlds? creatures of a superior rank and of nobler powers, whose natures were never stained with sin, nor their souls wrung with anguish? No: they are the sons and daughters of Adam who are in Christ Jesus; the men and the women who, from a discovery of their guilt and wretchedness, have fled to the Lord Jesus Christ; have embraced him as all their salvation and all their desire; and who, from love to his name and gratitude for the matchless condescension and kindness which he has shewn them, are actively and unreservedly devoted to his interest and honour.

My dear readers, Are you in Christ Jesus? Are you living on him by faith? Do you count all things but loss for his sake; and determine to know nothing save Christ, and him crucified? Then, were death to cut you down this moment, where would you be the next? In heaven; before the throne; in the presence of God and of the Lamb; and in full possession of all the dignity and blessedness that encircle the presence of the Eternal. For blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. They are absent from the body, and present with the Lord.

Now: have all the dead, who have died in the Lord, been instantly admitted into heaven; and if you are in

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Christ; were death now to strike you down, would you also, in a moment, be translated from earth to heaven, from your present employments, to the full blaze of celestial glory, and all the ecstacy of its elevated and enraptured adorations? Then, where is the decree or mandate that prohibits you just now from tasting your sacred and religious joys, and dooms you to dejection and distress? Had the last saint, who entered the golden gates of the new Jerusalem, any better right or firmer claim to its felicity and honour than his union to the Lord Jesus Christ? And, joined to him in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, loving him with your whole heart, and cleaving to him with all your strength and mind; your plea is just as strong and your title as valid as his. Were death, therefore, this instant, to snap asunder the frail thread of life; without the slightest accession to your right, would you, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, clear all the distance betwixt the throne of grace and the throne of glory, betwixt the society of the saints on earth, and that of the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven? Then, granting that your pilgrimage were yet to extend to threescore and ten, on what ground can you believe that you are debarred from the immediate, full, uninterrupted enjoyment and use of all the riches of redeeming grace; and all the unsearchable loving-kindness of an infinite God?

The bare gift of God in creation and in providence, without any additional security, completely warrants us to apply and use the precious benefits which he confers. And is any thing more than his free gift requisite to authorize and encourage you to rest on the Lord Jesus Christ; and, from this day and onward till you shall see him as he is, to appropriate and use all the promises of his word, and all the provisions of his love? Yet to you God gives his Son, his righteousness and strength: to you he gives his grace and Spirit. All things are yours. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Is the man entitled by the gift of God to the enjoyment of his life and health? the philosopher, of his rea-

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son and learning? and the industrious, of their skill and success? And is there any thing more than this free gift necessary to imbolden you forthwith to convert, to all the purposes of your own holiness and comfort, the immense and invaluable provisions of the everlasting Gospel?

Do I say that this is your right? I must go farther; and affirm that this is your duty. For what more than the commandment of the great and eternal God is needful to render any exercise, whether pleasant or painful, your obvious and indispensable duty? Why was Abraham bound to offer up his Son? Why are you obliged to deny yourselves, to take up your cross, to follow Christ? to give yourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer? to practise honesty and charity? to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life? Because such are the plain and express commandments of God. And is his simple commandment sufficient to enforce the performance of these duties? And is any thing more necessary to bind you to live on Christ; to walk by faith; to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; to rejoice in the Lord alway, and again to rejoice; to abide in him; and to cultivate that peace which passeth all understanding, and that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory?

When such are the privileges and duties of Christians; let me entreat all who are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, and who are laying up your treasure in heaven, to avail yourselves of your advantages. Endeavour to rise superior to disquietude and fear. Labour to realize the things that are freely given you of God. Live on your inheritance. Leave no part of it unoccupied and unemployed. Gather more and more of the first-fruits of the Spirit. And strive more and more to maintain and establish that peace and joy which arise from faith in the Saviour and close communion with God; and which are a foretaste of future glory.

By conduct such as this,

I. You will greatly promote the honour of God.

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Loaded with his blessings, and under such immense obligations to his generosity and grace, can you resist the inquiry, What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits?

There is nothing by which you can more decidedly express your own gratitude and more effectually advance his honor, than by your real satisfaction in his friendship and happiness in his service. It is greatly to the discredit of a teacher or a general, when their scholars or soldiers are peevish and discontented, melancholy and miserable. But it reflects the highest honour upon the wisdom of their measures, and the kindness of their hearts, when those under their charge are attached to their persons, and evidently delighted with their situation and employment. And can any thing cast a greater shade over religion, than to see those who profess it, going in the bitterness of their spirits; seldom or never serene or cheerful, but frequently trembling and complaining? But he that offereth praise glorifieth God. The man whose spirit and temper demonstrate that the lines have fallen to him in pleasant places, and that he has a goodly heritage; that the possession of the whole creation would be a poor and empty acquisition, compared with an interest in the favour of the great and the eternal God: that man does justice to the goodness and liberality of his heavenly Father. He does honour to the gospel which he has embraced, and contributes to raise religion in the esteem, and recommend it to the pursuit of those around him.

The men of the world do justice to their friends, and credit to the objects which they pursue. They speak with rapture of their connexion with the wealthy and the great, and give unquestionable proof of their gratification upon every accession to their property or fame. Now, shall they feel or express delight and exultation in their paltry and perishing pleasures? What satisfaction should you feel, and what gratitude and rejoicing should you display, for all the riches of redeeming mercy and all the inexhaustible resources of eternal glory? Shall they exhibit marks of contentment and happiness in the bondage of sin and in the drudgery of Satan? And shall you be-

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tray melancholy and sadness in the service of the Father of mercies, and in the glorious liberty of the sons of God? Shall they exult in the hollow and precarious pleasures of a transitory world? And shall you be gloomy and depressed who have all the blessings of the everlasting gospel, and all the fulness of Deity for your portion?

Is it fitting that the children of a king should be sad from day to day? Should the brethren of Jesus, and the heirs of his eternal glory, allow their brows to be wrinkled with care, or their hearts filled with anguish? From the men of the world who have their portion here, whose treasures are confined within the narrow limits of earth and time, who are without God and without hope, we might justly expect the sigh of disappointment, and the murmurs of vexation and despair. But should not Israel rejoice in him that made him? Should not the children of Zion be joyful in their King? Called by his grace into the fellowship of his dear Son, and made partakers of all the plenitude of his salvation; should not your temper and deportment correspond to the magnitude of your privileges, and the grandeur of your prospects? And since your enjoyments and hopes so infinitely surpass all that worldlings know; should not you labour as far to excel them in the calmness and tranquillity of your spirits, and in the stability and elevation of your happiness and joy? "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright. Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice."

Religious peace and joy contribute greatly

II. To advance the salvation of your brethren.

The eyes of many are upon you. Every thing bordering upon dejection and melancholy has a tendency to disgust the ignorant and the worldly at the ways of godliness, and to make them cling more tenaciously to their sordid and forbidden pleasures. Finding in sin much to gratify their low and vitiated taste, and strangers to the hopes and consolations of the gospel; they rashly and unjustly

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conclude, from the dismal appearance of its timid and morbid disciples, that our encomiums upon its importance and excellence are false; and that it is their wisdom to cleave to the joys which they know, rather than renounce them for those which are unknown, and which they regard as doubtful or visionary.

Multitudes, accordingly, of the gay and the thoughtless are deterred from crossing the threshhold of Christianity, from the apprehension that they must leave all liveliness and cheerfulness behind them, and spend the remainder of their pilgrimage in gloom and dejection. Many of the young contemplate a devout life with horror: and the aged votaries of vice and folly tremble at the thoughts of their children or relatives being brought under the power of the truth, from the fear that it would ruin their success in life, and deprive them of all felicity and joy.

Every instance of religious gloom and despondence has a tendency to confirm these prejudices, and to counteract the diffusion of the benign and salutary influence of our holy faith. But when by the calmness of your minds, and the general amenity and cheerfulness of your tempers, you demonstrate that there is an unquestionable reality and an indescribable worth and power in the hopes and comforts of the gospel; this conduces to soften their aversion to Christianity, and to excite a love and a longing after an interest in its invaluable blessings. When they see that godliness has the promise of the life that now is; that even in the present state, they have great peace that love the law of God; that they walk in the light of the Lord, and in His name rejoice all the day; that even in the things in which they fancy that they excel, you are immeasurably above them; this convinces them of the certainty of what the Bible reveals, and affords them a security that all the promises of better and nobler enjoyments will be amply fulfilled in the world beyond the grave.

If therefore you would wish to gain your fellow-immortals to the obedience of the faith, and preserve them from everlasting wretchedness and ruin; if you would wish to do justice to the religion which you profess, and

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raise the name of Jesus above every name, let the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your heart and mind: abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost: let the world see that he that believes has eternal life; and that the way to heaven above lies through a heaven below. Show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Religious peace and joy contribute greatly

III. To improve your holiness.

We are not our own. We were formed for the service and honour of God. We are bought with a price; and are bound to glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are his. We are required to receive, observe, and do all things whatsoever God hath commanded us. We must do whatsoever our hand findeth to do, and do it with our might. When we pray, it should be as with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: when we hear, it should be as for eternal life: when we enter upon any religious undertaking or beneficent enterprise, it should be with all the energy and decision of men who are determined to spend and be spent in works of faith and labours of love, and who are resolved that Christ shall be magnified in us and by us, whether that shall be by life or by death.

But how can these grand ends of the christian life be obtained while you are distracted betwixt hope and despair? How can you advance in the christian course, if you are obliged to devote to the combating of your doubts and fears that attention and energy which ought to be sacredly reserved for the calls of piety, and exerted in the positive active service of the Lord? Instead of advancing boldly into the broad field of duty, and embarking in the work of the Lord with the intrepidity and zeal of men who are in earnest for eternal life; your minds will be confined to inferior and elementary matters. Instead of being occupied with manifesting the glory of God, you will be engrossed with the means of ensuring your own peace and safety. Your religious progress will

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be limited and desultory: your graces will be feeble and languid: your troubles multiplied and painful: and your assaults from Satan frequent and galling. The most sickly and stunted plants are the first that are attacked by vermin: the most weak and timid animals are the first victims of the beasts of prey: and the most downcast and desponding Christian is the most unfit for the various duties of his calling, and suffers most from the cruel annoyances of the great enemy of souls.

But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. The man who knows his calling and election of God; the man who has the witness in himself that he is Christ's, can keep nothing back from his divine and adorable Master. He yields himself to him entirely, and lives to him, and to him alone. In the attitude of ready preparation and of cheerful submission to his will, he stands waiting the injunctions of his Master, saying, "Here am I, what wouldest thou have me to do?" He is stedfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: and whatsoever he does, he does from the heart, and as unto the Lord and not unto man.

If therefore you would wish to grow in grace; to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; to abound in the fruits of righteousness; to shine in the beauties of holiness; to know, obey, and submit in all things to the will of God as the angels do in heaven; give all diligence to make your calling and election sure, and to maintain that peace which passes all understanding, and that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

IV. Religious peace and joy have a great effect upon your happiness.

Would you like, ten, twenty, or thirty years after this, to be free from all care and fear, from all distress and pain, from all sickness and sorrow; to be perfectly holy and completely happy? In short, would you like when you die to go to heaven, to see God, to be with Christ, to walk with him in white, to follow him whithersoever he goes, to possess fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore?

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If you would wish to be perfectly happy then: why should you decline this day, this hour, to be made exceeding glad in the light of his countenance, and to have the peace of God reigning in your heart, and keeping your heart and mind? If you are longing for an abundant entrance at death into the everlasting kingdom and joy of your Lord; is there any reason why, in the meantime, you should refuse the first-fruits of the Spirit, and a foretaste of that rest which remains for the people of God? Is there any reason why you should postpone your bliss, and tie yourselves to distraction and misery for another hour?

If there is no cause at all for lengthening out your wretchedness, be persuaded instantly to banish all your doubts and fears; to secure clear and scriptural views of the fulness and freeness of the Gospel, of the compassion, the power, and all-sufficiency of Jesus; of your own right and title by his own word and promise to all the riches of his grace and all the blessings of his salvation. You shall then know your calling and election of God. You shall then be feasted with fat things and fed with hidden manna. You shall know the things that are freely given you of God: and though not so high, you shall be as safe, and almost as happy as the spirits of the just made perfect. Can they possess a right of nearer access into his presence, than what you enjoy; who are permitted at all times to approach boldly to his throne; to come near unto him, even unto his seat, and to order all your cause before him? Can they possess a more intimate union with Immanuel, than that which is formed betwixt him and the subjects of his saving mercy, who already are joined to him, and made one spirit? Can they enjoy the protection of a God more powerful, than Him who speaketh, and it is done, who commands and all things stand fast? Can they be blessed with the affection of a more ardent and faithful friend, than him who sticketh closer than a brother? Can they be enriched with the munificence of a benefactor more liberal and kind, than him who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all? Can they claim a portion more immense, than the

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fulness of him who filleth all in all? or an inheritance more comprehensive and inexhaustable than that of being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ?

The highest around the throne can possess nothing nobler nor better than the presence and the favour of Him in whom all fulness dwells; who wields the universe at will, and is in all, and through all, and over all. Yet if you are Christians, all these inestimable privileges and honours are your own. Can any thing therefore on this side of heaven contribute more to your real dignity and delight, than to clear up your right to the provisions of the everlasting gospel, to realize your interest in the love of God, and live upon your spiritual and eternal portion?

If therefore you value real felicity; if you covet solid and lasting peace, learn the sacred art of living wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and of abiding in the joys and comforts of the Holy Ghost. This will raise your mind above all that is vain, or low, or painful. This will sweeten every trouble, and enhance the value of every blessing. This will fortify you against every danger, and carry you in safety and comfort through every difficulty and trial. This will teach you to rejoice in tribulation, and to glory in the cross. This will enable you to look forward to heaven as your home; and, long before you leave your cottages of clay, give you a specimen of its elevated honours and ineffable enjoyments.

Many things concur to deprive believers of their religious comforts. In the Gospel, however, there is enough to meet every case of spiritual distress and trouble, to relieve you from all your embarrassment and melancholy, and to establish and maintain the most delightful and stable peace and joy.

We shall now consider in detail some of the principal causes of religious distress, and the means by which they may be most effectually met and removed.

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CHAPTER II.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM THE GREATNESS OF SIN.

"Why, thus, my soul, with sin opprest?
And whence these woes that fill my breast?
In all thy care, in all thy woes,
On God, thy steadfast hope, repose."

SECURE and hardened sinners give themselves little or no concern about their souls, and the means of laying hold on eternal life. They take pleasure in unrighteousness; roll iniquity like a sweet morsel under their tongue; make a mock at sin, and sport themselves with their own delusions. From their systematic neglect of the Bible, of prayer, of the ordinances of religion; and the pertinacity with which they persevere in habits of ignorance, indolence, and impiety; instead of regarding religion as the one thing needful, they seem to consider it as the only thing that is needless; and instead of believing that there is any exertion necessary to get to heaven, they appear to imagine that the great difficulty lies in getting to hell.

No sooner, however, does the Holy Ghost set home the commandment upon the conscience in its purity and power, than the man obtains clear and impressive ideas of the exceeding sinfulness of sin in general, and of the number and enormity of his own transgressions. He discovers that all unrighteousness is sin, and that the wages of sin is death. He finds that all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and that that heart of his, in which he had trusted as generous and good, is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Salvation now becomes the

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supreme object of his desire and pursuit. His great solicitude is to be delivered from the wrath to come. His earnest and unceasing inquiry is, What must I do to be saved? He hears of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ: but he has lived so long in sin, he has done so much to grieve the Spirit of grace, and provoke the God of glory, that he is terrified lest grace will not reach, lest mercy will not pity, nor the adorable Redeemer, all kind and compassionate as he is, spare a rebel so unworthy, nor extend forgiveness to a criminal so vile and abandoned as he.

If this is the case with any of my readers; think not that I can provide for your relief, or minister to your comfort, by declaiming on the general mercy of God, by palliating the evil of your trespasses, or by extenuating the danger of a carnal and irreligious life. I dare not insult nor deceive you by representing that base and abominable thing as possessed of slight and trifling demerit, which has defaced the image of our Maker on our hearts, unhinged the frame of nature, and brought the Lord of glory to the tortures of the cross. Neither the tongue of men nor of angels can express the turpitude and malignity of sin, nor the horrors of a ruined eternity. And though God is rich in mercy unto all them that call upon him; he is a God of purity. He is glorious in holiness; and will by no means clear the guilty without satisfaction to his justice. Unless, therefore, your transgressions are forgiven, and your sins covered, you are under sentence of condemnation, and exposed to all the power of his anger. And "who knows the power of his anger? Who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can lie down with everlasting burnings?"

To provide for your encouragement and comfort, I must renounce all these false and ruinous delusions, and lay before you more Scriptural and solid grounds of consolation. I must reason with you respecting the power and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fulness and freeness of his salvation. And here I may observe that, though there is an exceeding sinfulness in sin, and its just and natural wages are eternal death; though your

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offences have been infinitely heinous; and, criminal and profligate as others have proved, the number and flagitiousness of your provocations have exceeded: yet if after all you loathe yourselves for your iniquities, and are grieved and heart-broken for your transgressions; if after all you are longing for reconciliation to God through the blood of his Son, and will only come to Christ, and cleave to the atoning efficacy of his death; I can assure you that you have no cause of discouragement, nor any reason for despair.

If you have any ground for considering your case as desperate, this must be, either because you believe that your guilt is too great for the blood of Christ to wash away, or that its magnitude has rendered him unwilling to impart to you the blessings of his salvation. It must be because you suspect that he wants either the ability or the will to save you.

But is there any foundation for either of these awful suspicions?

I. Do you fear that your guilt is absolutely too great for the power and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to remove?

Jesus is the Saviour. He is the Mediator betwixt God and man. He was given for a light to the Gentiles, that he might be the salvation of God to the ends of the earth. The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

And is Jesus unfit for his office? In selecting a Saviour for the common benefit of our race, did the Father lay our help upon one unequal for the mighty and appalling task? and, while our world was occupied by wretches, covered with the deepest crimes, and polluted with the foulest abominations; did he commit the work of redemption to one unable to bear the iniquities of us all, and incapable of saving every soul that sought his aid? When he lighted up the bright and beauteous sun, within his fair and splendid orb he lodged a plenitude of light and heat sufficient to illumine and to cheer all that live. When he formed the firmament of heaven, and poured

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around our globe the liquid atmosphere; he gave them space and expansion to admit all who move and breathe, and furnish every living thing with a never-failing supply of vital air. And in redemption, the last and greatest of all his works, where he has outdone all the productions of his hands, and eclipsed all the former manifestations of his wisdom and power, are we to suppose that his resources have not risen to the height of the great enterprise? Has he encountered difficulties with which he cannot grapple, met with maladies beyond the reach of his might, and too desperate for the resources of his love? Are there cases of guilt and wretchedness where his benevolence is overcome; and, notwithstanding all his kindness and compassion for the penitent, he sinks beneath the dreadful undertaking, and finds himself unable to save?

Jesus is almighty. He is God as well as man. He speaks, and it is done: he gives the commandment, and all things stand fast. And is there any thing too hard for God? Is any service too complex or arduous for him who suspends creation on his arm, and wields at pleasure all the energies of omnipotence? And whilst as God his power is almighty; as Mediator, by the union of the Divine with the human nature, his atonement is possessed of unbounded value, and perfectly sufficient for the free, complete, and everlasting salvation of mankind. Let the applicants for his grace be ever so numerous, and their crimes ever so malignant and atrocious; yet, on collecting into one all the sins of all the children of Adam, to what more could the whole black and odious mass amount, than one infinite heap of filth and loathsomeness? And can the obedience, the sufferings, and sacrifice of a person of the Divine dignity, and the matchless excellencies of Immanuel, be less than infinite?

Let, therefore, your former character and present condition be what they may; though you have run to the excess of riot, wrought unrighteousness with greediness, and been almost in all evil; though you have been guilty of the most impenetrable hard-heartedness, the grossest ingratitude, the basest treachery, and the most vile and provoking rebellion against the God of grace; yet if, after

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all, you are ashamed and confounded for your transgressions, and longing for restoration to his favour, you may with safety and confidence come unto Jesus, and intrust into his hands the whole of your eternal interests. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot unto God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?" The sea has deeps capable not only of concealing molehills, but of burying the largest mountains. And in the ocean of redeeming mercy there are deeps sufficient, not only to hide small offences, but also to cover the most horrid and enormous transgressions. "The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin."

And whilst there is an inexhaustible efficacy and worth in the obedience, in the sufferings, and sacrifice of our Divine and adorable Redeemer, to pardon all the guilt, and to justify the persons of the whole human race, if they will only come to him; can you for a moment suppose that,

II. The magnitude of your crimes has excluded you from the hope of mercy, and that he has any reluctance to receive you on your return, or any backwardness to bestow upon you the blessings of his grace?

Can you argue his reluctance and backwardness from the universal calls and free offers of the Gospel? from the repeated and positive commands given to all to believe on his name, and to accept the blessings of his salvation? from his affecting expostulations with the impenitent, his gracious promises to every one who comes to him, and the awful denunciations which he pours out against all who reject the provisions of his mercy? or from the past exercise of his grace, and the instances in which he has saved the most profligate and abandoned?

Can you argue his reluctance to receive you, however guilty, on your return, and his backwardness to bestow the blessings of his grace,

1 From the universal calls, and the free offers of the

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Gospel, addressed without discrimination and without reserve to sinners, whether great or small?

Into whatever corner of the sacred volume you cast your eyes, you find the most ample and delightful proof that the Gospel of peace is not a well shut up, nor a fountain sealed; that it does not confine its immense and invaluable blessings to a dozen or a score, to a few of a family, or the remnant of a tribe; but lays open its rich and ineffable treasures to the enjoyment and use of all the children of Adam. Its calls and invitations reach the utmost ends of the earth, and embrace, in their generous and heavenly provisions, every class and description of human wretchedness. The language in which it lifts up its voice, and addresses itself to the ears of mortals, uniformly runs in terms such as these: "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come: and let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." And in the same spirit of genuine, ardent, unrestricted liberality; in his last commission to the Apostles, Jesus charged them to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel unto every creature." He well knew what a set of criminals our globe contained: he well knew how low some were sunk in ignorance and brutality, and how furious and ungovernable others were in vice and profligacy. But without limitation or reserve he commanded the Gospel to be preached to the basest and most hardened of the whole. Have you ceased to be inhabitants of the earth? Is your depravity more deep and dreadful than can be exhibited by human creatures? If not, then you have the most abundant encouragement to return to the Lord, and lay hold on the offers of his grace: for after this solemn charge to make a universal

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proclamation of the Gospel, he adds, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Can you argue that your sins are too great to be forgiven; or that God has any backwardness, on account of their magnitude, to receive you, and bestow upon your the blessings of his grace,

2. From his repeated and positive commands, not excepting the most vile and unworthy, to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and to embrace the provisions of redeeming mercy?

The bare communication of what is necessary to our welfare, constitutes a sufficient right to its enjoyment and use. When the poor are presented with alms, and the sick with medicine, this completely warrants them to accept them. The gift of reason, and the possession of the means of mental improvement, perfectly authorize us to exercise our understanding, and cultivate our intellectual powers. The mere opportunity of securing our safety, establishes a right to escape from the crush of a falling edifice, or from the yawning of an earthquake. And when our souls are poor and wretched, diseased and dying, sunk in depravity, and in danger of being swallowed up by everlasting destruction; after the God of peace has placed the Gospel of his grace within our reach; that Gospel which contains all that is requisite for our temporal happiness and eternal welfare; what more than this marvellous manifestation of his mercy can you desire, to entitle you to lay hold on the salvation which it reveals, and secure all the immense and inexhaustible blessings which it brings?

After God has given us eyes and ears; instead of disputing about who has a right to enjoy and use them, I would like to know who is debarred from the privilege of possessing them, and of availing himself of all the advantages and comforts which they impart? After the almighty arm of Jehovah has hung out the effulgent orb of day to illumine and cheer the countless millions of our race; instead of disputing about who has a right to look on his radiance, I would like to know who is discharged from basking in his beams, and taking the full benefit of.

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his light and heat? And when the ever-blessed God has sent his mercy after us; when he calls on all the helpless and miserable wanderers of our race to return to the arms of his love, and find their heaven of heavens in his presence and favour: instead of contending about who has a right and title to go to him, or to believe on him, I would like to know where is the man or woman who is prohibited from approaching him, and from embracing the offers of his compassion, and the provisions of his beneficence? When a king sends to a city, languishing under the horrors of famine, a supply sufficient to meet their wants, and appointed expressly for gratuitous distribution amongst all the sufferers; who has a right to intercept the flow of his bounty, or to cut off the meanest and most obscure within the walls from the effects of his munificence? And when God has so loved the world, that he has given his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life; when the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost, and invites all to look to him, and be saved: I would like to know who has a right to come betwixt us and the all-glorious Mediator, and arrest the generous current of his kindness? Has the most indigent and starving a right to the royal bounty? And shall the vilest and most abandoned of our race, upon his application, be debarred access to the adorable Redeemer, and excluded from embracing the blessings of the common salvation?

But if the mere universal offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, authorizes all to accept it; tell me how mightily, how irresistibly, this right is strengthened and confirmed, when the gift of salvation is accompanied by an express injunction to receive it? Now, in order at once to cut up every fear and jealousy by the roots, and to lay the controversy at rest for ever respecting the right and warrant of sinners to go to the Saviour and embrace the blessings of the great salvation; we are commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is represented in the Scriptures not only as practicable, as warrantable, and lawful; but as our positive, binding, and indispensable duty. "This is his commandment, that ye should be-

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lieve on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."* The first commandment in the law is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." But as every prohibition requires the reverse of what it forbids; as the prohibition of murder and theft, requires the preservation of life and the exercise of brotherly kindness: the prohibition of having any other gods, obliges us to take the Lord for our God, and to employ him for all the blessed and glorious purposes for which an infinite and all-sufficient God can be applied and enjoyed. To have the Lord for our God is the same as to possess an interest in all the riches of redeeming mercy, and in all the fulness of the everlasting Gospel. This is the finishing, the crowning blessing in the dispensation of grace. What more could Adam in paradise have desired, or what more can an angel in the world of light enjoy, than to be united to the Most High, and have the Lord for his God? Yet, so far from being left in uncertainty about your right to go to the Saviour, and accept the unsearchable riches of his grace, by the clear and express authority of the great and eternal God, you are commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to take the Lord for your God.

And do you need a special warrant to do your duty? After we are plainly enjoined to search the Scriptures, to pray, to venerate the holy name of God, to reverence his sanctuary, and hallow his Sabbaths; is a new and additional warrant, written, signed, and sealed, by the hand of the Most High, necessary to authorize us to fulfil these obligations? And when we are so distinctly and forcibly enjoined to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus; what additional security can you demand to imbolden you to rely on the righteousness of Immanuel, and to take all the riches of redeeming love for your own?

If you make any dispute about the extent of the Gospel call, and the right of the sinner to go to the Saviour, and embrace all the fulness of the great salvation; I would like to know who has a right to search the Scriptures, to

* 1 John iii. 23. John vi. 29.

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pray, to reverence the name of God, and keep holy his Sabbaths. If you can tell me who is discharged from the performance of the one duty; then, but not till then, I can tell you who is debarred from the other. If you can point out a man or a woman, who, in consequence of the greatness of their guilt, are forbidden, by express and positive statute, from searching the Scriptures, from praying, from reverencing the name of God, entering his house, or keeping holy his Sabbaths; then, but not till then, will I be able to point out a single individual, who, from the number and enormity of his crimes, is prohibited from coming to the adorable Redeemer, and claiming through him an interest in all the blessedness and glory of the great salvation. The calls of the Gospel are as wide as the requisitions of the law. If the last reach the farthest limits of the globe; the former also extend to the utmost ends of the earth. And the authority of Jehovah is just as great and as irresistible in the one, as in the other. The precept, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul," is not more clear and obligatory than the command that all men should repent and believe the Gospel. And till the magnitude of your offences shall release you from the obligation to love the Lord with your whole heart and soul, no amount of criminality can free you from the obligation to return to the Lord, and to believe on Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

Thus, by the provisions of the everlasting Gospel, the blessings of salvation are rendered accessible to the whole human race; and it is as much the duty as the privilege of every man who hears them to embrace them: and it is at his peril, at the peril of his immortal soul, that he has the presumption and madness to reject them. And when it is thus rendered your duty to believe on the Son of God, will you contract any guilt, or incur any danger, by doing what he says; and, in compliance with his commandment, trusting in him, and resting on him? Will you be condemned for reading your Bibles, speaking the truth, and practising honesty? And will you be more exposed to condemnation for believing, in obedience to the injunction of the Most High, on the name of the Lord

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Jesus Christ? Guilt and danger lie in disregarding the authority of God, but not in submitting to his will, and complying with his gracious requisitions.

Your guilt may be great and your iniquities abominable and horrid. But all unrighteousness is sin, and the wages of every sin is death. On the field of battle, some of the fallen may be more deeply wounded, and more hideously disfigured than others. But all the slain are equally dead: and while nothing less than Omnipotence can reanimate those who have been most slightly injured, this is able to revive those who have been most awfully torn and mangled. And though the transgressions of men are possessed of every different degree of criminality; yet by nature all are dead in trespasses and sins; and while nothing less than the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save the most decent and harmless of our race, these are sufficient to save the vilest and most unworthy.

Can you argue that the number and enormity of your sins have placed you beyond the reach of mercy,

3. From his fervent expostulations with the most impenitent and profligate; his kind promises to all who return; and his dreadful denunciations against those who, from their carelessness and carnality, refuse to be reconciled to him through the blood of his Son?

Not satisfied with giving the most unlimited invitations, and the most positive commands to believe on the Saviour; he accompanies the whole with the most earnest and affectionate remonstrances with the impenitent and profligate. "What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Much as you have done to provoke his indignation, he has no pleasure in your death. If you will only return to him, you shall live. Your guilt, however great, shall be forgiven; and your iniquities, however heinous, shall be blotted out. He does not ask, why you have polluted yourselves with

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vice; why you have sinned against your own souls; rebelled against his authority, and involved yourselves in guilt and depravity: but why, by rejecting the great salvation, and all the provisions of his mercy, you will entail on yourselves the everlasting consequences of your crimes, and deprive yourselves of all the blessedness and glory of his kingdom?

Without excepting the most flagitious and atrocious offenders, he gives the most kind and unqualified assurances of a gracious reception to all who return. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

In order to rouse them to consideration, and reclaim them from the evil of their ways, and the ruin that attends them; he pours out the most awful denunciations against the profane and the hardened. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh."

Look at all this, and say, if he is not only willing to receive all who come to him, but even strongly set upon your salvation? When he has all power in heaven and in earth; when in a moment he could render a due reward to the wicked, and turn all the profane and profligate into hell; unless he is solicitous to secure your salvation, why does he bear, with so much long-suffering, all your provocations and sins? Why does he give you line upon line, and precept upon precept, and bless you with all that is necessary to ensure your present and eternal welfare? Why *did* he assume our nature; sojourn as a man of sorrows in this world of guilt and woe; submit to the ago-

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nies of Gethsemane, and the tortures of the cross? What was the design of all this but to dissipate every suspicion and fear; and assure you that whosoever will may come unto him, and that him that cometh he will in no wise cast out?

Can you urge the hopelessness of your situation on account of the greatness of your sins,

4. From the past exercise of his grace, and the instances in which he has saved some of the most abandoned and vicious of sinners?

In strict conformity with the letter and the spirit of the instructions which they had received from their adorable Master, the Apostles carried the glad tidings of salvation through the earth, even unto the utmost ends of the world; and did not shun to declare, even unto the most vile and desperate whom they encountered, all the counsel of God. Constrained by love to Christ and compassion for their perishing brethren, they regarded themselves as debtors to the Jews and to the Greeks, to the barbarians and Scythians, to the bond and the free; and wherever they could gain the ear of a human creature, however sunk he might be in infamy and foul with crime, they did not hesitate to proclaim the riches of redeeming mercy, and point him to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Listen to the language in which St. Paul addresses the Jews at Antioch:—"Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Now who were the Jews to whom such an unqualified offer of gospel grace was given? Were they virtuous and upright men? Were they penitent and humble? possessed of pious hearts, and contrite spirits? They were men of whom the Apostle was persuaded, that, whilst they wondered at the truths which he delivered, they would reject his testimony, and perish in their sins. The event awfully verified his fears. "They were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming." Nevertheless Paul and

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Barnabas affirmed, that "it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto them."* And if these proud, impenitent, blaspheming and persecuting Jews were invited, entreated, commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and assured that, on their believing, they should receive the free remission of all their iniquities: then who can be excluded from the calls of the everlasting gospel; or be so low, depraved, and loathsome, as to be beyond the reach of the compassion and kindness of the Almighty Redeemer?

Such were the state and character of the people among whom the Apostles were sent to exercise their ministry. They were blind, foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and passions. The success, however, of the benevolent labours of these heralds of mercy was great. Though the Jews at Antioch rejected their message; multitudes were pierced to the heart; subdued to the obedience of the faith; proselyted to the holiness, and blessed with the happiness of the Gospel. And if they were not too depraved and hardened to become the subjects of saving mercy, are you too abominable and filthy to experience the pardoning and sanctifying efficacy of Immanuel's blood?

By nature all are guilty before God. There is not a saint now in heaven, but who by birth was a child of disobedience and wrath; and up to the moment of his justification, was under sentence of condemnation, and exposed to all the horrors of everlasting misery. The salvation, therefore, of every individual, however sober and moral, is an act of divine mercy, and may be justly regarded as an illustration of the freeness of grace, and of the ability of Jesus to save. There are cases, however, in which he travels out of his ordinary course, and appears to select men conspicuous for their criminality, on purpose to give lustre to the riches of his compassion, and shew what a God of boundless generosity and almighty power can perform. Such were the Corinthians. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not

* Acts xiii. 38—46.

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deceived: neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."* Such too were the Ephesians.† And such too was the great Apostle of the Gentiles. He was a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious: howbeit for this cause he obtained mercy, that in him, the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.‡

It is scarcely possible to conceive a greater excess of riot than that to which some of these men ran, nor a greater degree of heaven-daring wickedness than that with which they were chargeable: and yet they were pardoned, reconciled, and saved. And after this, can you doubt that there is mercy with God, and that with him there is plenteous redemption? Did they obtain salvation with eternal glory? and can you fear that your application shall be rejected; and that, though you return to the Lord, he will refuse to accept your surrender?

Dreadful as your state and character may be, can you find no parallel to them in the former manifestations of saving mercy? Have you opposed the truth, and reviled the characters of the faithful? Paul persecuted the church of God, and wasted it. Have you lived long in iniquity, and by your influence and example imboldened others in vice! Manasseh had grown hoary in the ways of wickedness, had taught Judah to transgress, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Have you sinned against light and conscience, and after making a profession of the truth? David and Peter had long walked in the good ways of the Lord, when they fell by their iniquity. And notwithstanding the enormity of their offences, were these all washed from their pollutions, and saved in the Lord with an ever-

* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. † Eph. ii. 1—7. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 13—16.

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lasting salvation? and are your trespasses too foul to be blotted out, and your guilt too great to be forgiven?

Even supposing that your case surpasses in atrocity every precedent; that, though the hearts of others have been hard, and their conduct detestable; your heart has been still more stubborn and refractory, and your conduct still more dreadfully and outrageously wicked: remember there never has, and there never will, a single soul sink into perdition from a defect in the power and grace of the Redeemer. His power is almighty, and his blood cleanseth from all sin. Many a dreadful desperate case has been put into his hands: but never one of them has failed. And though his mercy and his might have been exerted far, they have not reached their utmost limits. Bring then your matchless, indescribable case to this Almighty Saviour, and he will surpass all the former exercises of his generosity and power. Seize the opportunity, which it affords you, of doing the highest honour to the riches of his grace, and of enabling you through eternity to be loudest in the song of grateful adoring praise. Go to him, and you will find that this indeed is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and"—will he spurn him from his presence? make him a monument of his holy indignation against iniquity, and render him as miserable as he has been sinful?—"let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

But amidst all the abundant and endearing encouragement to return to God; remember the necessity of coming to the Saviour, of believing on him, and of trusting in him. He can save to the utmost: but they that are far from him shall perish. The munificence of the most liberal benefactor can do us no service, unless we accept his bounty. And unless we embrace it, all the salvation that is in Christ will not impart the smallest advantage to our soul. Religion is a personal thing, which every individual must possess for himself, before he can derive the

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slightest benefit from the blessings which it contains. The most valuable medicine can relieve none but those who employ it. It does not attack contagion in the abstract; nor extirpate the maladies for which it is a specific by encountering them in the atmosphere, eradicating them in the regions where they are engendered, and thus annihilating them all over the globe. And though Jesus has finished transgression, and made an end of sin; it is not by extinguishing its existence, nor expelling it from the universe, but by removing it from the conscience of individual believers, and by cancelling before God the guilt of those who personally embrace him.

Take care then, amidst your doubts and your fears, lest Satan gain an advantage over you; lest he and your own deceitful hearts lead you to reject the righteousness of Christ, under the plausible but ruinous expectation, that by length of time, and a more sedulous application to the task of moral duties and religious observances, you may hereafter become more fit objects of mercy, and more worthy recipients of the favor of God. None ever was, and none ever will be accepted in the Beloved, but in the character of a sinner. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost; not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. It is as a sinner that you must apply; for you never can have redemption but through his blood. Salvation is the gift of God. Though you should wait till the blast of the last trumpet, it would be as a gift that even then you could receive it: and as a gift you are welcome to it now.

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CHAPTER III.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM THE FEAR OF HAVING COMMITTED THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

"O save a trembling mourner, Lord?
Whose hope, still hov'ring round thy word,
Seeks for some precious promise there,
Some sure support against despair."

NOTHING affords a more amiable and decisive evidence of a genuine Christian, than tenderness of conscience, and a habitual fear, and an unchanging abhorrence of all evil. Whilst sinners boldly adventure upon the most flagrant offences, give themselves no uneasiness about the most foul and horrid enormities, and even glory in their shame; a real Christian trembles at every appearance of the abominable thing which Jehovah hates; dreads the smallest approach to evil; and, if ever he is actually overtaken with iniquity, is covered with shame and filled with terror lest his guilt, however comparatively slight, should prove too great to be forgiven.

This is the black brand fixed by the hand of the Eternal upon one of the sins of the sons of men. The same Scriptures which every where, in language the most distinct and impressive, proclaim the irresistible power of the Redeemer, and the inexhaustible efficacy of his blood; the same Scriptures which expatiate upon the riches of his grace, and the fulness and freeness of his salvation; plainly and forcibly tell us, that there is one sin for which no blood has been shed, and for which no pardon has been provided; a sin which excludes the perpetrator from hope,

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and seals him up for inevitable destruction. This is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

Because the invitations of the Gospel are so liberal and comprehensive, that salvation is offered unreservedly to all; because we are so completely assured of the omnipotence of the Saviour, and the all-sufficiency of his atonement; many have supposed that there is no sin exempted from remission; and that the only circumstance which prevents the pardon of any sin, is the obstinate, persevering, and final impenitence of the transgressor.

Of the extent of Immanuel's power, and the virtue of his sacrifice, we never can entertain an opinion too high. If such were his will, he is able to sprinkle the conscience of every child of Adam, and to purge our guilty globe from every stain and vestige of evil; to extinguish the flames of hell, and to cleanse its most black and loathsome regions, from every trace of pollution and crime; to empty it of its inmates; to convey them to paradise; or to light it up with the splendours of purity; to replenish it with the transports of praise, and the ecstacies of bliss; and convert its wide and dreary domains into an image of heaven, and an abode of holiness and delight. For he is able even to subdue all things to himself. But the question is not, what is he able to accomplish? but what has he promised to perform? And when we find that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is represented as just as really a separate sin, as robbery or murder; and when we are just as distinctly told that it shall never be forgiven, as that all other sins, upon the faith and repentance of the sinner, shall be forgiven: we are bound to regard it as a specific sin, and to believe that it shall never be forgiven. This is the case from no defect in the power or grace of the Redeemer; but entirely from his righteous determination to exclude those who commit it from the exercise of mercy, and to leave them uniformly as monuments of his justice. Final impenitence is not so much an independent sin, as the natural and ordinary consummation of a gay, thoughtless, careless, and irreligious life. But, as many who live in this manner, scarcely ever heard that there is a Holy Ghost; with what propriety

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can they be said to blaspheme him? Undoubtedly all who are guilty of blaspheming him, die impenitent; but unless we are prepared to style insensibility and security blasphemy, we have no authority for maintaining that final impenitence is the sin against the Spirit of God.

No express notice is taken of this sin in the Old Testament. But though the name does not occur, we are almost inclined to think that the thing existed; and that it appeared at a very early age of the world. There seems to have been a period in the lives of Cain, Balaam, and Saul, when they were totally abandoned of God, and given over to perdition. And there is reason to believe that there was something bordering upon this sin, in the case of those Jews for whom Jeremiah was forbidden to pray; and of Ephraim, at that awful crisis, when he was joined to his idols, and ordered to be let alone.

The first occasion on which it is directly mentioned in the New Testament, is in consequence of the accusation of the Pharisees, that our Lord was in confederacy with Satan, and cast out devils by the assistance of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.* The next intimation which, it is supposed, is given of this sin, is in the case of Simon Magus; whose heart was wholly engrossed with the love of gain, and who imagined that the gift of the Holy Ghost might be purchased with money, and converted into a mean of promoting his worldly aggrandisement.† To this subject Paul also is thought to refer, when he says, "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief:"‡ words which seem to imply, that, if what he did had been done with the knowledge and conviction of Christ's real character, his condition would have been absolutely desperate. In the epistle to the Hebrews, when speaking of the danger of apostasy, he obviously alludes twice to the same sin.§ This appears to have been the sin committed by the apostate and licentious teachers, whom Peter so

* Mat. xii. 31, 32. Mark iii. 28, 29. Luke xii. 10.
† Acts viii. 18—23. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 13.
§ Heb. vi. 4—6; x. 26—29.

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severely reprobates.* And it evidently is this sin which John has in view, when he says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it."†

From these different passages, it appears that there are various shades and degrees of this sin; and that it is not any particular act of sin that renders it unpardonable, but the particular circumstances under which it is committed. "The act, in the case of the Pharisees, was uttering blasphemous language against the miracles of Christ; in the supposed case of Paul, it was blasphemously persecuting, and otherwise injuriously treating the church of Christ; in the case of the Hebrews, it was apostasy from the truth; in the case of the false teachers described by Peter, it was not only persecuting the truth, but returning to sensual abominations." So that instead of denying the reality of an unpardonable sin, it would be nearer the truth to say, that there are different kinds of sin that are unpardonable.

Without pretending to define accurately what the unpardonable sin is; for the relief of those who are groundlessly alarmed with the fear that they have committed it, it will be proper to point out the principal circumstances in which it consists.

1. It includes opposition to Christ and his cause.

This is a quality which, in a greater or less degree, belongs to every sin: but it is pre-eminently characteristic of that one which is declared to be irremissible. This evidently was the case with the Scribes and Pharisees. When by a miracle, Jesus had given an indubitable proof of his mission, and forced upon the people the conviction that he was the long-looked for Messiah; to what measures had the Pharisees recourse? Like candid and honest men, who were doubtful of the reality of the mighty work which they had witnessed, did they leave the multitude to the free exercise of their judgment? carefully abstain from infusing either prejudice or prepossession into their minds? encourage inquiry? assist them in their re-

* 2 Peter ii 20—23. † 1 John v. 16.

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searches? and anxiously examine every incident by which they and the people might be enabled to arrive at a fair and satisfactory decision? This certainly is the course which they would have adopted, if they had been men of integrity, and had found themselves at any loss upon the subject. But without feeling the least uncertainty respecting either the author, or the nature of the miracle; convinced that it laboured under no fraud nor artifice, but was a direct result of Divine power; in order to blast his reputation, and prevent him from enjoying the reception that he deserved; from pure antipathy against his person and his cause, they falsely and maliciously branded him as an impostor and an agent of Satan. "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils."

2. It arises from hatred and malice.

It is not committed from want of care and watchfulness, as in sins of surprise; nor from want of knowledge, as in sins of ignorance; nor from want of courage and resolution, as in sins of infirmity; nor from rashness and self-confidence, as in sins of presumption: but it possesses a guilt and malignity peculiar to itself, by proceeding from pure and unmingled hatred against Christ and godliness. Could they obtain their desire, they would gladly, not only extinguish the religion which he has left us, but also annihilate his own existence. They wish that there were no God. Their language may be bad and abusive. Their actions may savour strongly of the camp of Satan. But their hearts are worse; and could we only see what is passing there, we should find unbridled fury rankling against God and goodness. This was the case with the Pharisees. They hated Christ. They endeavored to ensnare him in his teaching: and sought by what means they might take away his life. They did not put him to death in anger: for that acts rashly, and without reflection: but consulted how they might destroy him; and employed artifice and cunning to apprehend him: and thus were deliberate and malicious murderers. And the same spirit of malevolence still characterizes the conduct of apostates. They crucify Christ afresh. Unable to repeat the literal action; by renouncing the faith of the Gospel, and bring-

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ing by their ungodly lives disgrace on the cause which they once professed, they give their consent and sanction to the diabolical deed of the Jews: they trample his blood under foot, and do despite to the Spirit of grace.

3. It is committed in opposition to light and knowledge, and the conviction of the sinner's own mind.

This is a circumstance which is inseparable from its nature, and goes far to mature and complete its guilt. Paul admits that if he had knowingly committed the crimes with which he was chargeable, his case would have been hopeless. But amidst all the means of better information that he possessed, he never had been persuaded of the truth of Christianity, and that the cause which he was persecuting was the cause of God: and, therefore, he tells us, he "obtained mercy, because he did it ignorantly, in unbelief." The Hebrews not only had the Gospel clearly announced unto them, but they had become the subjects of deep convictions and powerful impressions. They had been enlightened, and tasted the heavenly gift; they had been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. Though none of these expressions denotes that Divine change which necessarily accompanies salvation; they at least intimate, that they to whom they are applied, had been made to feel convictions peculiarly deep, and impressions of no common strength and liveliness; and, therefore, their future apostasy was a sinning wilfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth.

This was the principal ingredient in the sin of those apostates mentioned by Peter. Their doom was sealed, because "after they had known the way of truth, they had turned aside from the holy commandment." And there can be no doubt that this was the circumstance which placed the Pharisees beyond the reach of mercy. Though they affected to treat Christ as an impostor, and to regard his miracles as the effect of magic or diabolical enchantment; in their hearts and consciences they knew better. They knew who he was.* They were convinced of the

* John vii. 28.

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Divine origin of the works which he performed. When he pronounced the parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, they perfectly comprehended his design: and though they could not deny the truth on which it was founded; with a pertinacity and hardihood, well worthy the first-born of Satan, they persevered in acting upon the principle which it suggested: "This is the heir, come let us kill him."* Though they pretended to persecute him for sedition and blasphemy, the real cause on account of which he was put to death, was the number and the undeniable truth of his miracles.† Because we are forbidden to pray for the remission of the unpardonable sin, and yet our Lord prayed for his murderers; some have supposed that the Pharisees had not been guilty of this crime. But those for whom Christ prayed, knew not what they did. But this was far from being the case with all who had a share in his death. They who seized him because he was the heir, and who coolly replied to the heart-rending confession of Judas, that he had sinned, in that he had betrayed the innocent blood, "What is that to us? see thou to that;" could not allege the plea of ignorance. They sinned with their eyes open; and knew well what they were doing.

4. It is accompanied with blasphemies and reproaches. It is not confined to the heart of the individual. It does not consist solely in mean, dishonorable, and impious thoughts of God. From the meaning of the word blaspheme, which signifies to revile or speak reproachfully, we are led to believe that it uniformly proceeds to open ungodliness. Not satisfied with renouncing his own allegiance to the Most High, this sinner wishes to unhinge the Divine government over others, and involve them in the same perdition with himself. He works unrighteousness with greediness; runs to the excess of riot; and glories in his shame. By his foul and profane conversation; by his audacious and infidel arguments; by his vile and abominable works, he labours to shake the faith, undermine the purity, and ruin the souls of all around him, and

* Matt. xxi. 33—46. † John xi. 47, 48.

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send down the rank and virulent poison of vice and profligacy to generations yet unborn.

It need scarcely be added that,

5. It extinguishes the desire of repentance, and is exasperated by every attempt to admonish the criminals of their danger, and lead them to return to God.

Sold unto iniquity, and completely in love with unrighteousness, they hate every appearance of piety and worth; and the more religious and spiritual any measure is, they regard it with the more bitter and implacable rancour. If exhorted to repent and reform, they reject every entreaty and call: for they have loved idols, and after them they will go. They may not always believe that their conduct is right, or their state safe. The devil himself cannot believe that it is either his duty or his interest to resist the government of the Almighty, and make war against the peace and felicity of the universe. And though they know well that the face of God is set against them that do evil, and that none can harden themselves against him and prosper; having long lived in sin, and wrought unrighteousness with greediness, they become the slaves of their lusts and passions, and are led captive by Satan at his pleasure. Their corrupt habits obtain an uncontrolled dominion. And every effort to rouse or reclaim them, only strengthens their enmity against their benevolent advisers and the good ways of God, and leads them to launch out into deeds of darker atrocity and still more horrid impiety. Why then should they be stricken any more, when they revolt more and more? "Let no man strive nor reprove them. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

Such appear to be the principal ingredients in this matchless enormity; which carries human depravity to its consummation; which makes the perdition of the rebel at once certain and dreadful; which links earth to hell; and, before the daring offender quits the precincts of time, gives a sure and an awful presage of his eternal destiny. He dies in his iniquity: not because there is any defect in the power or grace of the Redeemer, but because he

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has proudly scorned all the overtures of mercy, and all the calls of grace. He dies in his iniquity; not because repentance and reformation are unprofitable or unattainable, but because his hardened heart has rendered him reckless of his fate, and filled him with a rancorous, unyielding aversion to the holiness and spirituality of the Gospel. And having thus rejected the only means of salvation, and having done despite to that blessed Agent through whose influences only that salvation can be applied, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for" his "sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment."

Now are these things so? Does this sin consist in opposition to Christ and his cause? Does it arise from hatred against him and his glorious Gospel? Is it perpetrated in defiance of the convictions of conscience, and the dictates of a better judgment? Is it accompanied with reproaches of the faithful, and blasphemous language against God and godliness? Does it extinguish the desire of repentance, and exasperate the sinner by every attempt to rouse and reclaim him? Then how can you believe that you are chargeable with this unparalleled atrocity, who are mourning over your transgressions, and longing to be reconciled unto God through the blood of his Son? who prefer Jesus to your chief joy, and would gladly raise his name above every name? who are labouring to comply with every intimation of his pleasure, and abased and heart-broken because you love him so coldly, and serve him so imperfectly? whose bowels yearn over his people? who delight in the society of his saints? who are striving to bring all to the knowledge of his Gospel, and to fill the whole earth with his glory? who are ashamed and confounded for your past iniquities? groaning under the body of sin and death? and imploring grace to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven? When the very first effect of this sin is to sear the conscience, to make the transgressor regardless of the consequences of his conduct, and render him more determined and audacious in deeds of profligacy and vice; can you who are standing in awe of the Divine judgments, who are loathing yourselves for all your abominations, and

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are imploring deliverance from their guilt and power; can you maintain that you are chargeable with this consummation of human impiety, and given over to blindness of mind and hardness of heart? When it leads those who commit it to despise the ordinances of religion, to undervalue the blood of Christ, and to treat the favour of God with contempt; can you be labouring under the blasting influences of this matchless outrage against High Heaven, when conscious to yourselves, that you delight in the services of devotion, that you count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and would gladly part with the wealth of ten thousand thousand worlds, to enjoy an interest in the loving-kindness of the Lord? Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? or can the feelings of friendship be found in the heart of an enemy? or the fruits of penitence and piety in an impenitent and carnal mind?

While you still continue to bewail your offences, and to long for an interest in the favour of the Most High, on what account can you suppose that you have sinned the sin unto death?

Perhaps some will tell me,

1. It is because they have stifled the convictions of conscience, and resisted the work of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts.

It is really unspeakably dangerous to suppress the remonstrances of conscience, and to trifle with any of the admonitions of the Spirit of grace. In righteous displeasure, God may leave us to our fate, and withdraw all further application to our understanding and our heart. When he sends his mercy after us, to recall us from our wanderings, and bring us back to his friendship and service; we can never too speedily nor cordially comply with his gracious invitations. To disregard his kind and condescending addresses, is the height of criminality and hardihood; and may justly provoke that dreadful sentence, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: I will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

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But however criminal and dangerous, we are not warranted to say, that the stifling of convictions and the resisting of the work of the Spirit upon the heart, are the sin against the Holy Ghost. Though he will not always strive, he has long patience with men. He waits to be gracious: and amidst their carelessness, security, and obstinacy; by his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, labours to bring them to repentance. Accordingly, many a sinner, who has long done violence to his convictions; who has disregarded the calls and warnings of the word of God; and in order to shake off his alarms and fears, has plunged deeper into worldly and wicked pursuits; after all has been made willing in a day of power. The young sinner, who has brought the gray hairs of his parents with sorrow to the grave: has himself, before old age came on, yielded to the sceptre of mercy. The stout-hearted, who, by their sturdy defiance of the authority of Heaven, have proved the vexation of one pastor; long after his bones have been laid in the dust, have, under the labours of another, been subdued to the obedience of the faith: just as thousands of the Jews, who had stood out against the preaching of the Son of man, were gained by the ministry of the Apostles. If therefore you are grieved that you have so long resisted the Holy Spirit; if you truly desire to be reconciled unto God, take with you words, and turn to the Lord. It is not yet too late. His language is, "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation."

. Some may tell me that they apprehend that they are chargeable with having sinned the sin unto death, because

2. They are haunted with foul, odious, and horrid thoughts concerning God, and Christ, and things divine and eternal.

Remember that there is a prodigious difference betwixt consent and compulsion. If you forcibly enter the habitation of another, and replenish your house with the plunder of his; you are a house-breaker and a villain.—Though you should not plant a foot upon his possessions; yet, if you are privy to the burglarious designs of others, and aid them in secreting and disposing of his property·

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you are deeply criminal in the eye of God and of man, and justly liable to all the penalties due to an associate in their felony. But if, whilst ignorant of their persons and their plans; the depredators, in order to insult and annoy you, should fill your premises with their booty; if night after night they should repeat the outrage, and deposit their spoils in your dwelling: while you abhor their unlawful proceedings, and are grieved and ashamed at the indignity which they have inflicted; while you send the most prompt notice to the lawful owners, and raise the hue and cry against the banditti; whilst you have recourse to every measure and employ every mean to check their depredations, and bring them to justice: can you be fairly chargeable with dishonesty and house-breaking?

If you deliberately cherish any foul and criminal thoughts you are a sinner. Whether you entertain those that spontaneously spring up in your mind, or indulge those that are suggested by wicked men or injected by Satan; you are deeply guilty in the sight of God. You may fancy that whilst your thoughts are confined to your own bosoms, you are innocent and safe. This, however, is a most egregious delusion. For as every man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Your contemplations may be airy and visionary. They may never be reduced to practice, nor imbodied in actions. But the mind that can dwell with delight, even in idea, upon what is forbidden, is dreadfully polluted and desperately wicked. But if blasphemous thoughts are hated and repelled; if you labor to exclude them from your fancies, and to pre-occupy your mind with pure and holy meditations; if you pray for deliverance from every wandering and unworthy imagination, and desire above all things that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; if you endeavour to abide in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and maintain constant fellowship with God: however frequently and vehemently these detestable suggestions may return; however humbling, galling, and painful they may prove; can you be justly accused of being their author or abettor, and subjected to punishment for their unwelcome and hateful presence? It is not the crime, but the calamity of the man of integrity, that stolen

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goods are secretly thrown upon his premises. And it is not your crime, but your calamity, that you are pestered with the thoughts which you dread, and which you vigorously labour to drive away. It is an enemy that hath done it. For "if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." After shewing him all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them, the devil had the audacity to say to the incarnate Redeemer, "All these things will I give unto thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." And if the Captain of salvation was assailed with such an impious temptation, is it any marvel that his followers should be harassed with the most horrid and odious suggestions? While, however, you give no place to Satan, but resist him steadfast in the faith; all is safe. Greater is he that is for you, than all that can be against you. Rest on him, and cleave to him. He will bruise Satan under your feet shortly, and make you more than conquerors.

Some perhaps will tell me that they fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin, because

3. They have uttered blasphemous words against God, and Christ, and the Holy Ghost.

No language can express, nor any mind can conceive, the guilt and the danger of voluntary blaspheming the name of Him whom all nature obeys, and all the angels adore. Every thing approaching to profanity partakes of the dialect of fiends, and shews that the speaker is possessed of the spirit that reigns in hell. But we dare not say that even blasphemous words, when uttered through the force of delirium, or the surprise of sudden and violent temptation, are beyond the reach of forgiveness. To save his life, Peter denied his Master with oaths and curses. In his rage against the faithful, Paul compelled many of them to blaspheme. But, though their guilt was great; for a Christian ought rather to die than conceal his attachment to his Master, or betray the cause of the Gospel; we have no reason for believing that their crime was unpardonable, or their condition desperate. Peter obtained the remission of his iniquity; and it is highly probable, that some of those whom Paul had driven into this

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transgression were afterwards humbled for their offence and restored to mercy. Instances have occurred of persons, who, like Jerome of Prague, from a temporary alarm, have disguised or renounced their religion; who afterwards have been enabled, with heavenly calmness and holy fortitude, to surrender their lives for the truth.

If oppressed with the recollection, that in a season of melancholy or madness, you have spoken blasphemously, you ought to remember that melancholy and madness are diseases and not sins; and that they frequently deprive the sufferer of responsibility for his actions. We cannot blame the child who, in a fit of convulsion, unconsciously strikes his parents. And if you have unintentionally uttered profane and impious language, and are now grieved and humbled for what you have said; this grief and humility prove that you have not sinned beyond the possibility of forgiveness. If you had sinned the sin unto death, you would have been regardless of your fate, and given yourselves no uneasiness about the matter.

Some may tell me that they are afraid that they have been guilty of this sin, because

4. They have hated religion, and reviled and persecuted the pious.

But however heinous such a sin may be, I dare not say that even every kind of hatred of the truth and persecution of the righteous, is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. All natural men are enemies to God in their minds and by wicked works; and entertain a greater or less degree of antipathy against the Gospel and those who live under its power. And yet from the ranks of natural men God is daily adding to the church such as shall be saved. The more holy the man is, the more dreadful is the guilt of hating and abusing him. But the holiest man that breathes is not exempted from the obligation of the precept, even with respect to the most detestable miscreant that annoys him: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you." But if these crimes are unpardonable, why are we required to pray for the criminals? Where was there ever a

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greater degree of hostility cherished against Christianity, and the followers of Christ, than by Paul before his conversion? What greater malice could be entertained against God and goodness, or what more horrid atrocity could be perpetrated, than was manifested by those who took, and crucified the Lord of glory? yet even some of these were pricked in their hearts, repented, and were baptized with the Holy Ghost.* And if melted into contrition upon account of your past enmity to God and his people; can you doubt, if you apply to the blood of sprinkling, that a free and full pardon will also be extended to you?

Some perhaps may tremble lest they have committed this unpardonable crime, because

5. They have sinned deliberately and wilfully, when they knew that what they did was wrong, condemned by the law of God, and exposed to the severest visitations of his vengeance.

But though presumptuous sin is possessed of the deepest dye; and, without repentance, will be followed with the most dreadful retributions; we dare not say that even this, heinous as it is, is beyond the reach of forgiveness The sin of David in the matter of Uriah; the sin of Jonah, in fleeing from the presence of the Lord, when sent to proclaim the Divine judgments against Nineveh; must have been committed with the knowledge that they were evil, and calculated to draw down the wrath of the Most High. And yet David and Jonah were afterwards brought to genuine humiliation and contrition of spirit, and were pardoned and accepted.

Others perhaps may tell me that they are terrified lest they have committed this sin, because

6. After making a profession of religion, they have fallen by their iniquity; and now when they would wish to be reconciled to God, and return to their duty and allegiance, they cannot.

They feel no compunction for their sins; no bitterness nor vexation of soul for the evils that they have done;

* Acts ii. 36—41.

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and, though they wish to mourn over the dishonour which they have offered to the blessed God, no tear drops from their eyes, and no sighing nor sorrow proceeds from their soul. Notwithstanding all the guilt under which they are lying, their heart remains as cold, hard, and insensible as a stone. They fear that their day of grace is past; that God has given them up in anger; and that all their alarms and terror are no better than the unsanctified horrors of the proud and impenitent Saul, when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him; or of the wretched Judas, who repented, and went and hanged himself.

For the relief of persons in this situation, it must be observed, that there is a wide difference betwixt sickness and suicide. The patient is unexpectedly seized with his malady: he dislikes it; and longs to recover his health. The self-murderer courts death, and is resolved on his own destruction. And there is as great a difference betwixt backsliding and apostacy. The backslider may not be so completely humbled and melted as he would wish for his treachery and baseness. But whilst he abhors himself, he loves and adores the glorious God: and, whilst he is oppressed with an overwhelming sense of his monstrous unworthiness, he has no desire to increase it. Though fallen he has no wish to lie still. The strongest, the supreme desire of his heart is to be raised from his degradation; to regain his former standing; to recover his lost joys, and to be fixed more firmly than before, in the love of his heavenly Father. But the apostate, when he falls, has no desire to rise. He wishes to lie still; and is irritated at every attempt to raise and restore him. The backslider, when admonished of his offence, returns speedily, and seeks earnestly after God. The apostate is indignant at his reprovers; and, the farther he proceeds in his ungodly career, becomes still more outrageous in vice, and more desperately set upon his sins. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. Peter as well as Judas sinned against the Saviour: Cranmer as well as Sharp betrayed the faith. But whilst the one was instantly roused to a sense of his criminality, and made the most ample reparation

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within his power for his crime; the other plunged deeper and deeper in guilt, till his course of impiety was arrested by the dread realities of eternity.

Whilst, therefore, you abhor the sins which have separated betwixt your soul and God; while you supremely prize his favour, and eagerly employ the means for regaining his friendship; how can you believe that the day of your visitation is past? What affinity can you imagine betwixt your case and that of Saul; who, when he perceived that the Lord had forsaken him, forsook him still further; and much as he had previously done to provoke him, completed his career of rebellion by having recourse to an avowed agent of Satan? What resemblance can your conduct possess to that of Judas; who, after he had betrayed the innocent blood, instead of repairing to the great atonement, insulted the all-sufficiency of the Redeemer's sacrifice by refusing to apply to the merits of Immanuel, and by seeking a refuge from the distractions of his conscience in the horrors of self-slaughter?

In short, though the Scriptures speak of many sins against the Holy Ghost, with the exception of blasphemy, none of them is declared to be unpardonable. We read of lying unto the Holy Ghost; of resisting, of tempting, of grieving, and of quenching the Spirit; but however foul and offensive, none of them is said to be beyond the reach of mercy; and, therefore, we may safely conclude that, upon the repentance of the criminal, they may be forgiven. Whenever, therefore, either the careless, the wordly, or the profligate, on reflecting upon their own state and conduct, think that they have reason to believe they have been guilty of this unparalleled enormity: or the people of God, through the violence of temptation or of mental distress, suspect that they have fallen into this depth of Satan; your wisdom is, instantly to inquire what is the particular sin against the Holy Ghost with which you are chargeable. For though you have reason to tremble upon account of every sin; yet unless you have been guilty of blasphemy, you have no ground to despair. Have you lied unto the Holy Ghost? Have you resisted, tempted, grieved, or quenched the Spirit? Still, however heinous

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and dangerous these offences; however great cause you have on their account to be humbled in dust and in ashes; still, if you have not proceeded unto the more horrid ungodliness of blasphemy, you have no reason to abandon hope. If after all you repent and apply to the blood of sprinkling, these iniquities shall be pardoned, and these trespasses blotted out. For the Lord Jesus Christ most solemnly assures us, that "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." And of this sin, one of the first effects is blindness of mind and hardness of heart. Whilst therefore you are alarmed about your situation, and solicitous for reconciliation with God; whatever guilt you may have contracted, and whatever danger you may have cause to dread, your condition is not desperate: for you have not sinned the sin unto death.

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CHAPTER IV.

ON DISTRESS, ARISING FROM THE WANT OF HUMILIATION AND SORROW FOR SIN.

"Why sinks my weak desponding mind?
Why heaves my heart the anxious sigh?
Can sovereign goodness be unkind?
Am I not safe if God is nigh?"

We read in scripture of convictions of sin and emotions of sorrow preceding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We hear of many, when first brought to the knowledge of the truth, who have been filled with fear and shaken with dread; who have been laid in darkness and in the lowest deeps, where the wrath of God has gone over them, and where they have trembled lest in his anger he would cut them off. We have heard of some, who have been driven to their wit's end, reduced to the most awful extremity of perplexity and trouble; who have been made to drink of the cup of the Lord's fury, and undergo all the distractions of despondence, and all the horrors of despair.

Believing that what is the case with one must be the case with all, and that this agonizing perturbation and overwhelming sadness, are inseparable from the transition from a state of nature to a state of grace; many christians, because they never have experienced them, have rashly concluded that their religion is delusion, and all their hopes false and presumptuous. If they had been previously alarmed and agitated; if God had let loose his hand against them; if he had subjected them to consternation and terror, and made them pass through all the gloom and anguish of spiritual depression and melancholy; they

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imagine that then they would have had some ground of hope, and some cause for regarding themselves as new creatures and heirs of heaven. But when they reflect on the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of sin, on the dishonour which they have done to his blessed name, and the ingratitude which they have shewn to the adorable Redeemer; and after all find that their hearts are cold and lifeless, hard and unfeeling; they suspect that they are still dead in trespasses and sins. If they were properly affected with a sense of their guilt, they think that their heads would be waters, and their eyes fountains of tears; and that they would weep day and night for the evils which they have wrought, and the punishment which they have deserved. When, therefore, they discover such a humbling disproportion betwixt their sorrows and their sins; when they can sleep so soundly; live so securely; and feel so little grief and compunction for their iniquities: they apprehend that they have no part with the saints, and cannot be reckoned in the number of the mourners in Zion.

In order to mitigate and remove the pain which this subject occasions, it will be necessary to observe,

I. That no distress that we can feel, can ever equal the number or enormity of our offences.

Our forgetfulness of God and our disregard for his authority and rights, may well confound us, and compel us to go all our days in the bitterness of our spirits. Those sins which opened the world of wo, which brought our Redeemer to the dust of death, and filled his soul with unutterable anguish, may justly break our hearts, and cover us with shame and self-abasement. Sins such as these, will keep thousands of the gay and thoughtless weeping millions of ages hence. And in the mean time they strongly call for our deepest humiliation and sorrow.

But after all, our contrition and tears cannot efface the slightest spot of moral pollution. To accomplish this, nothing less than the sacrifice of Immanuel is sufficient. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." But whilst his blood is requisite to remove the stain of the smallest,

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it is able to wash away the guilt of the greatest sin; and as it is to him that you must have recourse at last for the pardon of your least offences, your wisdom and your duty are to go to him at first for the forgiveness of all your transgressions together.

II. The way to genuine and lasting consolation generally lies through the midst of terror and alarm; and a work of the law, of a greater or less extent and of a longer or shorter duration, usually precedes believing views of the Saviour, and a settled assurance of an interest in his salvation.

In every age, the road to Zion has gone through the midst of the thunders and darkness of Sinai. Before we are permitted to lie down in green pastures, or feed beside the still waters, we must pass through vallies of Baca and fields of solitude and desolation. For, since the salvation revealed in the Gospel is so utterly opposite to the strongest principles and the dearest pursuits of the carnal mind; till, by the denunciations of the law and the rigid demands of justice, the sinner is shut completely up unto the faith; how is it credible, how is it possible, that he will submit to the righteousness of Christ, and count all things but loss for his sake? It is no ordinary political tempest which will drive a proud imperious monarch from his throne; compel him to lay aside the robes of state, the pomp of royalty, and the indulgence of power; and descend to all the obscurity and privacy of a humble station. It is no common war of elements which will urge the beasts of prey to quit their native haunts, and seek shelter and protection in the habitations of men. And can we suppose that it is any moderate moral movement, any ordinary convulsion of the mind, that will induce an empty self-righteous, self-sufficient sinner to renounce all dependence upon his own wisdom and worth; to abandon his favorite habits and fondest pursuits; and with the feelings and language of a criminal, self-condemned and deserving to perish, to cast himself at the feet of the Saviour, saying, "In the Lord alone have I righteousness and strength?" Is it a crisis of every day's occurrence, which will constrain him to

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withdraw his affections from the world and sin, and fix them supremely and intensely on God, and heaven, and things divine and eternal? to cleave to the Saviour with full purpose of heart? to surrender himself to him entirely, and labour to magnify him in his body and spirit which are his?

The power that is able to accomplish all this must be indeed divine: and can we believe that the man, who is the subject of this astonishing transformation, can be insensible of its existence, or a cool and passive observer of its progress? When told that strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life; and that they must strive who enter thereat; when told that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and that the violent take it by force; can we imagine that a man can unconsciously make a forcible entrance by the narrow gate; or carry, without a contest, the kingdom of heaven by storm?

In every other instance where human happiness is at stake, no great nor permanent advantage can be secured, without being previously desired and vigorously pursued; and does a different law prevail in the regions of religion? It is only by well-concerted, earnest, toilsome application, that the evils of poverty, ignorance, and vice can be avoided, and the blessings of wealth, learning, and virtue can be obtained. And is the mightiest acquisition, that ever was submitted to the ambition of mortals; the acquisition, which demands and deserves the utmost exercise of resolute persevering energy; the acquisition which, from slaves of Satan, converts us into sons of God; which from the ranks of rebellion, and from being victims of divine vengeance, transfers us to the protection of the Almighty, and places us in the possession of all the fruits of his friendship; which, from being doomed to all the wretchedness of never-ending ruin, makes us heirs of heaven, and entails an eternity of blessedness and glory: can this acquisition be reached without design, or secured without a firm and determined effort? In other cases, where difficulties beset our path, and rivals retard, or enemies oppose our progress; it is only by repeated and sustained

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exertions that we can get forward, and we are perfectly aware of every step that we take and of every advancement that we gain. But in the conversion of the soul, where the obstacles are the most numerous and formidable, where our foes are the most cunning and malignant, and where our aversion to encounter them is the most strong and obstinate; is it possible that we can surmount the whole without a struggle, and stand out at last in all the safety of success, and in all the elevation of victory, without once discovering the perils with which we were surrounded, or the toils and conflicts in which we were engaged?

This view of the subject is confirmed by the representations of Scripture. We are there told that the law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ; that we must pass under the rod before we can be brought within the bond of the covenant; and that we must be subjected to the spirit of bondage, before we can be blessed with the Spirit of adoption, Christ tells us that he came to seek and to save that which was lost; not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And though the calls and invitations of the Gospel are addressed indiscriminately to all, and none who apply are excluded from their rich and invaluable provisions; still, from the manner in which they are expressed, it is evident that none will accept them but those who are convinced of their guilt and wretchedness, and have a strong and penetrating sense of their own absolute need of an interest in the righteousness of the Redeemer. It is thus that we are informed that they who are whole need not a physician, but they who are sick. It is thus that we are assured that Jesus was anointed to preach good tidings unto the meek; that he was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. It is thus that we observe him directing the most precious messages of his grace to those that are athirst, and to the labouring and heavy laden. It is thus that we hear him pronouncing blessings upon the poor in spirit, and upon them that mourn; and that we

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find him filling the hungry with good things, and sending the rich empty away.

From this and similar language, what other inference can we draw, than that, though no preparatory exercise of ours can either recommend us to the Saviour or augment the value of his infinite and all-sufficient righteousness; he must be endeared to our hearts by a work of the law before we will embrace him as all our salvation and all our desire; and that we must be convinced of our deep depravity and utter helplessness, be stripped of all our vain and self-righteous pleas, and driven from every refuge of lies, before we can know the value of his salvation, and be willing to remain eternal debtors to free, rich, sovereign mercy for all our happiness and hopes?

With whatever ridicule and scorn some may treat the contrition, the self-abasement, the alarm, and the fear of an awakened soul, as savouring of Mount Sinai, and utterly inconsistent with the liberal and gracious spirit of the Gospel; the fact is, that many who, both by themselves and the world, are regarded as very good christians, arrive at their peace and comfort far too soon. They no sooner hear of the necessity of redemption through the blood of Christ; than without embracing the offers of the atonement, they imagine that they are redeemed by his blood. They no sooner hear of the blessedness of those who are delivered out of spiritual darkness; than without taking one step to escape from the territories of Satan, they fancy that they are translated into Christ's marvellous light. They no sooner admit the necessity of running the christian race, and of fighting the good fight of faith; than without advancing an inch, or striking a blow, they suppose that they have finished their course and are entitled to the prize. Without quitting the dominions of the prince of darkness, or undergoing that renovation of nature, which every individual must experience before he can enter the kingdom of heaven; because they have acquired a knowledge of the doctrines, or assumed a profession of the truths of Christianity, they appropriate to themselves the promises and privileges peculiar to the sons of God. Instead of rasing the crazy and rotten foundation,

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they proceed to rear the walls of the new superstructure upon the ruins of the former. Instead of putting off the old man with his deeds, they endeavour to put on the new man above it: and instead of laying aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets them, and renouncing all for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus; they strive to retain their vices and corruptions, and to carry the whole along with them to heaven, and to plant them amidst the purity and bliss of paradise.

And what are the consequences of this preposterous and criminal conduct? Mistaking the shadow for the substance, the poor infatuated creatures believe that all is safe, and raise the lulling cry of Peace, peace, when they are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. If their previous state was bad, their succeeding condition frequently becomes worse. Having adopted a form of godliness, they flatter themselves that they have also secured its power: and every attempt to undeceive them, only excites their indignation and makes them cleave more tenaciously to their ruinous delusion.

If it is dangerous to have goods in your possession for which you cannot account; that religion is exceedingly suspicious, whose origin and progress you are unable to trace and explain.

Whilst, however, we are thus obliged to affirm that some distress of mind, some affliction of soul, some work of the law, in the case of every adult, must precede a cordial reception of the Gospel; we must on the other hand affirm,

III. That there is no particular measure prescribed in Scripture, either for the degree, or the duration of legal distress and terror.

Throughout all the works of God amidst a general resemblance, an endless variety reigns amongst the individuals of the same species. Though all are fair and odoriferous, the form and fragrance of one rose are distinct from those of another: and though every star is brilliant, one star differs from another star in glory. Nor is there a less admirable diversity in the mode of his operating, than in

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the results which he accomplishes. He formed the light in an instant, but the bodies of Adam and Eve in succession and slowly. In a moment and by the word of his power, Jesus restored Lazarus to life: but in opening the eyes of the blind, he again and again employed external applications, and spent a portion of time in performing the cure.

The new creation is the work of the same ever-blessed Author, and displays similar signatures of manifold wisdom and almighty power. The effects of regeneration are always in substance the same: but still there is no absolute uniformity either in them, or in the process by which they are produced. The standard, after which the christian character is formed, is perfect, fixed, and permanent. This is the unchangeable image of the Lord Jesus Christ. But whilst in their leading and discriminating features, believers possess a strong and striking similarity to their odorable Master; and from their likeness to him bear a visible resemblance to each other, still we can discern a manifest diversity among them: and on comparing their experience together, they frequently discover a great variety, both in the amount of their spiritual attainments, and in the manner in which they were brought to the knowledge and enjoyment of the Gospel.

Some have undergone deep distress. They have suffered the terrors of the Lord, and been distracted. He has met them as an armed man, and rent their hearts asunder. He has rushed upon them as the wide breaking in of waters, and covered them with all his waves. The sorrows of death have compassed them, and the pains of hell have gotten hold upon them: they have found trouble and sorrow. And from the scenes of suffering and anguish through which they have passed, they could almost as easily ascertain their gracious relation to God, as from the state of liberty and rest into which they have been introduced. Others have endured little spiritual trouble. Their passage from darkness to light has been so free from perturbation and terror, that they have been unable to tell either the time or the manner in which they were effectually called by grace. They perhaps have been

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sanctified from their infancy: or such a rich blessing has accompanied their early religious education, that they have been gradually and gently carried through the different stages of conversion, and savingly united to Christ, before they were sensible of the momentous fact. Such seems to have been the case with Jeremiah, the Baptist, and Timothy.

The duration, likewise, of this mental trouble, is as different as its degrees. Paul was blind three days: and during that period was probably subjected to a severe internal conflict. But Lydia appears no sooner to have heard the word, than to have had her heart opened, and to have been blessed with peace and joy in believing. Whilst some for years have groaned under the spirit of bondage; the jailor and the hearers of Peter, by a single sermon, were convinced of guilt, filled with grief and fear for their transgressions, and enabled to receive the word with gladness, and to rejoice in the Lord. Whilst Heman was afflicted and ready to die from his youth up; on the same day that grace first took possession of his heart, the soul of the penitent thief was admitted into paradise!

Since, therefore, there is such a diversity both in the depth and in the duration of religious distress; instead of afflicting yourselves about any deficiency in your convictions and contrition, your wisdom is to secure the great object which they are intended to produce, submission to the righteousness of Christ. This duty is rendered the more indispensable from the following facts. Hypocrites have frequently counterfeited religious alarm and dejection. And whilst some of the people of God have experienced little gloom or despondence; many of the unregenerate, at the very time that they were in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, from the accusations of conscience or the judgments of the Lord, without attempting to imitate them, and even in spite of all their efforts to suppress them; have been compelled to sustain the most distracting and overwhelming remorse and horror. Such was the case with Cain; with Saul; with Judas; and with that generation of vipers, who, under

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the ministry of the Baptist, seemed to be fleeing from the wrath to come.

Finding, therefore, that some who are strangers to the grace of God have felt a great amount of dread and sorrow, and that many of his children have been comparatively free from perplexity and terror; we are obliged to conclude that our religious condition must be determined by something more substantial and solid than the intensity or continuance of our convictions and fears: something which no unregenerate man ever felt, and which no hypocrite can counterfeit.

Besides, it deserves to be remembered, that, though none will submit to the righteousness of Christ till driven out of their own refuge of lies, the painful and long-continued distress which several have undergone, has arisen from some peculiarity in their own situation and character. Some have been pre-eminent in iniquity: and God, in his holy sovereignty, is pleased to make them feel what an evil and bitter thing it is, by giving them some drops of that cup of wrath, which in the days of their rebellion they had been madly employed in mingling. And others perhaps are subjected to extraordinary solicitude and suffering, because he intends afterwards to fill them with extraordinary consolation; or to qualify them for uncommon usefulness; by fitting them to counsel, encourage, and comfort others in similar trouble, with the consolations wherewith they themselves have been comforted of God.

If your grief has not been so pungent and oppressive as that of others; after all, it may be as sincere and sanctifying. It may have as effectually emptied you of your self-righteousness and pride, and conducted you with the same humble faith and lively gratitude to the Divine and adorable Redeemer. The sorrows, which in their case were concentrated within a few weeks or days, in yours may be spread over the whole extent of your pilgrimage. A small spring, in the lapse of time, will discharge more water, than the largest reservoir in the course of a single day. And the man, whose whole life is one unbroken humble tender walk with God; in his

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period of threescore and ten, may experience as much genuine contrition and self-abasement, as his brother, whose griefs and fears were more violent and intolerable, but confined to the commencement of his religious career.

In Scripture, accordingly, many exhortations are given to examine ourselves by the principles which we entertain, and by the habits which we have formed: but in vain shall we search all that sacred volume for a single injunction to inquire by what process our spiritual views and religious practices were adopted. The tree is known, not by the time or manner in which it was planted or cultivated, but by its fruits. And our state before God is to be determined, not by our former feelings and emotions, but by our present conduct and dispositions. The most tremendous threatenings are denounced against those who lay claim to the privileges of Christians, while destitute of the works of faith and the labours of love. But the voice of terror is never lifted up against any, who, by the purity of their faith and the ardour of their piety, give decisive evidence of the reality of their religion, merely because they have acquired it too easily or too speedily, and have not travelled through a sufficient length or depth of preparatory darkness and distress. Their works are regarded as sufficient evidences of their faith; but no strength of confidence, nor any degree of alarm and sorrow, can ever supersede the necessity of trying our faith by its effects.

If, therefore, your faith has purified your heart, and is working by love; reject not the rich consolations which the Gospel sets before you, because you have not been compelled to bear the same long and exhausting sorrows which others have endured. Dare you limit the Holy One of Israel? Can you tell how quickly and how easily, that God, who in the beginning spake and it was done, who commanded and all things stood fast; and who, in a moment and in the twinkling of an eye, shall raise the dead and change the bodies of the living saints into the likeness of the glorious body of our Lord: can you tell how quickly and easily he is able to form your souls

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anew, and translate you from the guilt and condemnation of nature, into the peace, the purity, the liberty, and the enjoyments of grace?

Having thus seen that the Scriptures prescribe no measure for either the degree or duration of spiritual trouble, and that it is fallacious to attempt to judge of our religious state by our preparatory distress and fear; it must be observed that these remarks are confirmed by remembering

IV. That the great design of these convictions and alarms is to unite the soul to Jesus; and to lead it to rely, for acceptance in the sight of God, simply on his righteousness.

It is in union with him that all our safety lies. "He that hath the Son hath life." However speedily and with whatever ease this union is attained, the salvation of him who enjoys it is secured. He shall never perish nor come into condemnation, but shall have everlasting life. But without this union, no terrors nor convictions, however penetrating and lasting, can ever advance us one inch on the road to heaven. "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The wrath of God abideth on him. And since we cannot be saved by our humiliation and contrition, it is manifest that the value of these depends, not upon their intensity and duration, but upon their nature and tendency. The most humble and broken-hearted penitent that ever entered the world of glory, never had any more compunction and contrition, than what convinced him of his depravity and worthlessness; imbittered sin to his soul and filled him with shame and self-abhorrence for the abominations of his heart and the evils of his life; discovered his utter helplessness and ruin; drove him out of every refuge of lies and shut him up unto the faith; brought him to the Saviour and led him cordially thankfully to embrace the provisions of his free and gracious salvation; and inspired him with love to the Redeemer and devotedness to his interest and honour. And while no penitent ever had more humiliation and compunction than this; no saint

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ever gained admission into the climes of bliss, who was possessed of less.

Instead, therefore, of perplexing and vexing yourselves about the amount or continuance of your previous alarm and trouble, your wisdom is to inquire into the effects which they have produced. What are the present leading and predominant desires of your souls? Have your concern and fear made you repent and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes? Have they constrained you to regard yourselves as the chief of sinners, and utterly unworthy to lift up your eyes to the habitation of the Divine glory? Have they forced you to ask what you must do to be saved, and led you to embrace Jesus as all your salvation and all your desire? Have they endeared him to your souls, and made you account all things but loss for his sake? Do you rely on him for righteousness and strength, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart? Is sin your burden and aversion? Do you shun all appearance of evil, and hate every wicked and false way? Are you crucifying the flesh with all its affections, and longing to be completely delivered from the body of sin and death? Do you esteem the commandments of God concerning all things to be right, and study at all times to walk so as to please him? Have you consecrated to him your time and your talents, and are you labouring to glorify him in your body and spirit which are his? Do you delight in his ordinances, and prefer his favour to your chief joy? Can you appeal to himself; and, in sincerity say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?"

If your consciences bear you witness in the Holy Ghost, that this is your state: then, notwithstanding all your doubts and fears respecting your want of brokenness of heart and humiliation of soul, this is a proof that you have passed from death unto life, and are made partakers of the good word of God and of the powers of the world to come. A larger measure of sorrow and self-abasement than this, none of the children of God ever carried along with them into the regions of endless light. And if you

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are possessed of this, you are in a state of grace: and a station there is next step to the kingdom of glory.

But if your compunction and contrition have not produced the effects which have just now been described, you are still without God and without hope. If you have not renounced all reliance on your own righteousness, and abandoned the love of every sin; if you are not resting on the righteousness of Christ for the acceptance of your persons, and living to the praise of his name: though you should have experienced all the remorse of Judas and all the horrors of hell, you have no part in the salvation of the Gospel. Whatever grief or fear he feels or affects for his past delinquencies, can you persuade me that that miscreant has become honest, who, at the very moment that he is imploring my forgiveness for a former depredation, has again gotten his hand into my pocket, and laid hold of my watch or my purse? The labours and and sufferings of Paul for the name of Jesus, demonstrated the soundness of his conversion. But if, after appearing in the congregation at Damascus; if, after rehearsing the marvellous events that had occurred on his journey, and assuring the brethren that he was become a disciple: who could have believed a word of his tale; if after all this he had gone to the rulers of the synagogue, produced the letters of the high priest and elders; and, taking advantage of his presence in the assembly of the faithful, had tendered a list of the names of those whom he had witnessed there, that they might be dragged to prison and to death? And when we know that in religion the Lord Jesus Christ is all in all, and that every man who has any religion whatever, relies upon him simply for righteousness and strength, yields himself to him entirely and lives to him alone: how can we believe in the soundness of your convictions, or the salutary nature of your fears and sorrows, if they have left you under the influence of any corrupt principle, or strangers to the purifying and transforming power of the grace of the Redeemer? They have missed the grand object and only profitable end of religious solicitude and trouble, which are union to Christ, and submission to the Gospel scheme of salvation.

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But if you have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you; if you are renewed in the spirit of your mind, and cleaving to Jesus with full purpose of heart: then, in whatever manner you may have been brought into this blessed state; whether it was suddenly or slowly, whether it was with deep and long-continued distress or with little uneasiness and trouble; still the state itself is on a level far above the reach of nature, and such as nothing less than the agency of the Holy Ghost can produce. And when thus possessed of the seal of the Eternal Spirit, why should you harass yourselves, because you are unable to ascertain the date, or describe the mode of his gracious operations? Show me a tree, clothed with foliage and bending beneath its load of grateful fruit: and though ignorant of the time when it was planted and of the manner in which it was cultivated, I can be at no loss to pronounce upon its healthy and thriving state. And show me a man who loves the Saviour with his whole heart, who is labouring to perfect holiness in the fear of God, who is abounding in the fruits of righteousness, and who is grieved and humbled because he feels so little of the power of religion and enjoys so few of the consolations of the Gospel; and, in whatever way he may have acquired these desires and views, whether it was with ease or difficulty; whether he was carried past the gates of heaven, or through the suburbs of hell; I can then show you a man who is born from above, and placed within the bond of the everlasting covenant of God. He has reached the city of refuge. He is fixed on the rock of ages. He is lodged within the tower of salvation. Humiliation and contrition have in his case gained their blessed and glorious object. They have driven him from the levity, recklessness, and self-righteousness of a natural condition, to the seriousness, the thoughtfulness, the faith, the love, the dependence and obedience which the Gospel enjoins and grace inspires.

If this is your situation, all is well. The guardians of corporate rights; however well qualified for the station that you occupy, or the office that you fill; will scowl on you as an intruder, and unceremoniously thrust you out,

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if you have not approached it along the chartered avenue, and through the medium of legal forms and observances. But the God of heaven never sacrifices the substance to the form. The grand design and ultimate use of alarm and terror are to shut us up unto the faith, and constrain us to embrace the provisions of his mercy. It is in union with Jesus that our salvation consists. And whenever this union is obtained, and by whatever means it may be secured, our eternity is safe.

So far from rejecting you because you have not been sufficiently humbled and afflicted for your sins, it must be added,

V. That no soul can ever apply too soon nor too confidently to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

In an alarming malady no patient can ever send too early for a physician. Indeed, till once he is aware of his situation, he will entertain no desire for medical advice. But the pain and languor induced by his complaint contribute nothing to the restoration of his health, nor to the efficacy of the practitioner's prescriptions. The ravages of disease spread more widely through his frame, and increase his sufferings and dangers with every moment's delay: and convince him at last, that it would have been well for him if he had called for the physician at first.

We never can repair too soon, nor submit too absolutely to the adorable Redeemer. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth: neither is there salvation in any other. Our acceptance with God does not, in the slightest degree, depend upon the depth of our humiliation, the pungency of our sorrow, nor the duration of our agitation, solicitude, and terror. The convictions of sin, the remorse of conscience, and the most distressing preparatory exercises through which any are called to pass, are necessary merely to shew us our need of Christ, and render us willing to rest upon his atonement. They rouse our drowsy powers to consideration, and break the waywardness and stubbornness of our spirits. They strip us of the pride, the vanity, the carnality, and self-righteous-

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ness natural to our minds; that, when thus emptied of all that would repel his grace and oppose the humbling and holy tendency of the gospel, he may become precious to our hearts, and we may cleave to him as all our salvation and all our desire. But they form no part of our redemption. They establish no claim to the Divine favour. They cannot awaken the attention, nor attract the sympathy of the Redeemer. They cannot recommend us to his notice, nor enable him to save us with greater facility or speed. He can save us at any time and in any circumstances. Whether we are young or old, newly awakenep or have been long depressed with the spirit of fear; if we will only receive him, he can instantly and completely save us. His power is almighty, and his blood cleanseth from all sin. His own language is, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink."

And do you ask when are you to look to him? to believe on him, and to go to him? Tell me, When is the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts? When is the patient to apply for a cure? or the inmate to quit his blazing crumbling tenement? And then I will tell you when you are to flee from the wrath to come, to go to the adorable Redeemer, and accept his all-sufficient salvation. Is it after you have toiled for years at the task of humiliation and self-denial? after you have walked a certain round of preparatory duties, and acquired a certain amount of religious attainments and qualifications? after you have melted your hearts into a desirable state of penitence, or steeped them for a becoming time in the sorrows of self-abasement and contrition? No: you are to go to him immediately, you are to believe on him this day, this hour, this instant. He himself says, "To-day if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts; turn ye to your strong-hold, ye prisoners of hope, for even to-day do I declare unto you, I will render double for all your sins." Can the ignorant ever obtain knowledge too rapidly? Can the transgressor ever cease too hastily to do evil, or learn too soon to do well? Can our fractured

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bones be reduced too speedily? Can the shipwrecked mariner be rescued too expeditiously from the horrors of the devouring deep? And can you ever be delivered too quickly from what constitutes the disgrace, the plague, and ruin of your souls; or be translated with too great despatch into the health-inspiring and bliss-creating liberty of the sons of God.

If salvation is what you really want; if you are ashamed and confounded for the iniquities which you have wrought; and astonished and abashed for the remaining insensibility of your spirits and hardness of your hearts; go to Jesus directly and submit to him now. You are not allowed a moment's delay. No man has a warrant for one instant to indulge in pride, envy, malice, covetousness, or murder. And what right have you, for a single second, to keep back your hearts from God, to trifle with the great salvation, and refuse the blood-bought atonement of the cross? While you are hesitating, eternity is rushing on: and what will become of your immortal spirits, if the gates of bliss are closed while you are standing in the porch of preparation, and have not stepped in to reconciliation with God and union with his Son?

The shortest indecision may undo you forever. Christ invites you now; and has pledged his word for the immediate acceptance of all who have recourse to his mercy. Time cannot increase his truth, nor give any addition to his tenderness. Your authority for believing on him is as great as it can be on your dying day: and salvation, with all its blessings, is just as free and attainable now, as you can suppose it to be even then. Could you live for ages, and spend every intervening hour in tears, lamentations, and prayers; after all, you could not then be more welcome to his arms, than you are at this moment. Even then, if saved at all, you must be saved by grace: and he is able and willing to save you by grace this day.

Be persuaded then to go to him instantly, and to believe on him immediately. Can you ever be too soon safe and happy? Can you ever be too soon reconciled unto God, and accepted in the Beloved?

Are you afraid that you shall obtain salvation with too

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great facility? Does it diminish the value of health, of liberty, of learning, or of fortune; that they have been acquired with little fatigue and trouble, with little suffering and solicitude? And can it lower the riches of redeeming mercy or the worth of eternal glory, that these immense and inestimable blessings have been gained with too great readiness and ease?

Salvation is the gift of grace. Could you wait in trembling anxiety and painful expectation till the blast of the last trumpet; if even then you would receive it, you must receive it as a free gift. As such it is proposed to you now. The God of truth this day declares, Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. Amidst the convulsions and the crash of a dissolving universe, Omnipotence cannot render the gift of salvation more gratuitous than it is at this passing moment.

If therefore you desire to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, take encouragement and come to him instantly. Wait for no additional preparation.

"Come needy, come guilty,
Come loathsome and bare:
You can't come too filthy,
Come just as you are."

It is a blessed thing to be humble and broken-hearted: but it is unspeakably dangerous to rely on our humility and contrition. Take care lest, by rejecting the free and gracious offers of the gospel, on the ground that you are not sufficiently affected with a sense of your sins; you make an idol of your convictions and sorrows, and either place them beside the righteousness of Christ, or substitute them in its room. The heart is deceitful, and ever ready to introduce some ground of self-dependence. Many long for greater humiliation, not to make them more sensible of their need of Christ, but to entitle them to his favour, and to render them less indebted to his mercy. Maintain a vigilant watch against this alluring, but ruinous delusion. For if you neglect the Saviour and lose an interest in his salvation; what does it signify whether this is the consequence of a love of iniquity, or of a legal and

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preposterous search after better qualifications to recommend you to the acceptance of that Saviour, who tells us that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance?

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CHAPTER V.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM THE WEAKNESS OR WANT OF FAITH.

"O for a heart to trust the Lord,
Who bids our sorrows cease!
For faith, to claim that gracious word
Mourner, cease thy tears."

FAITH enters so essentially into the substance of religion, that without it we cannot be christians at all. It is from the habitual use that he is required to make of this principle, that the christian receives the name of a believer, or a man of faith. He walks by faith; he lives by faith; he works by faith; he prays in faith; he suffers in faith; and, when the solemn day of his departure from time to eternity arrives, he dies in faith.

Nothing contributes so much to the happiness and holiness of the christian as a strong and lively faith; and nothing is more painful and discouraging than its feebleness and languor. Many of the children of God spend their days in sighing and their years in grief, from an apprehension that their faith is too weak to be genuine, and mixed with too much timidity and doubt to be either salutary or acceptable. They read of others who have been strong in faith; who have been able to hope against hope; and to declare, even amidst the most alarming and desolating dispensations, that though God should slay them yet they would trust in him. But the least trial is sufficient to shake their fortitude and blast their joys. A disappointment in their worldly prospects, or a slight distress in their families or amongst their friends, discon-

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certs and embarrasses them. The continuance of a temptation, the withholding of an answer to their prayers, the want of expected and implored communion with God, the loss of a relative, or the apparent approach of their own dissolution, covers their countenance with sadness, and fills their hearts with consternation and terror. They imagine that this would not be the case if they were rooted and grounded in the truth. They suppose that if they were possessed of a proper degree of faith in the Son of man, it would expel every slavish and distressing fear; that it would keep them in perfect peace; that it would make them strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; and inspire them with constant serenity and heart-elevating joy.

In endeavouring to minister to the encouragement and comfort of persons who are labouring under this distress, it is necessary to observe; that, though it is the duty of every christian to grow in grace, and to be strong in faith; the weakness, or supposed want of faith, is no conclusive proof of its absence; and complaints and fears on the subject, so far from being an unfavourable symptom, are in fact a token for good. The ruin of most men is, that they feel no solicitude about the matter. Without the slightest inquiry into the origin or nature of their religion, they take it for granted that their faith must be real, because they entertain no doubt of the truth of Christianity in general; and fancy that their state must be safe, because they are free from all apprehension about its issue. In spite of every remonstrance to examine and prove themselves, they go on with the lulling and fallacious cry of Peace, peace; at the very time when every thing in their spirit and practice gives sad reason to suspect that they are under sentence of condemnation, and far from God and hope.

Complaints, therefore, of the weakness or want of faith, are pleasing and encouraging circumstances. They prove that the man is concerned about the one thing needful, and indicate that he is possessed of some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. I do not blame my friend for the want of attachment, who is daily affording me in-

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dubitable proofs of his affection, and after all is deeply sorry that he cannot give me more substantial marks of his regard. It is that man's friendship which I question, who has the opportunity and means of effectually serving me, but who treats my wishes and interests with cold neglect. And I have no fear of the faith and the religious affection of the man, whatever depression he may feel, who is uniformly and earnestly labouring to walk before God with an humble and perfect heart, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness. But I tremble for that man's situation, who is full of hope, whilst his temper and conduct are betraying a sad inconsistency with the principles of genuine godliness, and who discovers no contrition for the evils he has done, nor any steady determined effort to avoid them.

When a man is grieved on account of the strength of his fears and the weakness of his faith; when he is ashamed and confounded because he cannot rely more firmly on the word of God, nor bear his trials with greater fortitude and patience, nor delight in the Lord more fully, nor serve him with greater cheerfulness and vigour: in all these cases we have reason to regard his complaints as things that accompany salvation.

In order to provide for the consolation and establishment of persons in these circumstances, we shall shew,

I. That many involve themselves in perplexity and trouble, from mistaking the nature of faith and the foundation of religious comfort.

II. That faith, though weak, may be real and saving. We shall then,

III. Give some directions to those who are weak in faith.

I. Many involve themselves in perplexity and trouble, from mistaking the nature of faith and the proper foundation of religious comfort.

Whatever definition may be given of faith: whether it is said to be a belief of the truth, or a trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of sin and the acceptance of our per

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sons with God; we find that it is a grace which is uniformly, supremely, immutably exercised upon the Lord Jesus Christ. To a believer Christ is all in all. To him Christ is wisdom, righteousness, and strength. Jesus is the foundation of his hope, and the source of his joys. Without him the Christian is nothing, can do nothing, and possesses nothing. But in Christ he is complete. With him he is safe and happy; he has all and abounds. By the illustrious men who composed the Catechism of the National Church of Scotland, faith has been most justly declared to be "a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the Gospel." The man who, despairing of Justification through any exertions of his own, is led, from the testimony which God has given concerning his Son, to rely on him alone for righteousness and strength, to prefer him to his chief joy, and to count all things but loss for his sake; however feeble his talents, or low his attainments; however limited his progress in godliness, or his success in good works; however small the amount of his consolations, or faint the grasp with which he clings to the anchor of hope; that man is a believer and an heir of everlasting life.

But instead of regarding faith as the soul's receiving and resting upon Christ, and drawing all their comfort from their interest in his righteousness and grace; many deprive themselves of the peace which they might possess,

1. By imagining that faith is somehow connected with great mental powers, and that one of the best sources of religious happiness consists in eminent accomplishments.

If a man preach with ability, pray with fluency and seeming fervour, and converse on religious topics with propriety and eloquence; they fancy that he is possessed of uncommon spiritual attainments, and greatly beloved of God: and because they neither enjoy the same apparent elevation of mind, nor the same liberty and enlargement of soul, they immediately conclude that they are destitute of the life and power of godliness.

But though great talents, when sanctified by grace, and consecrated to the service of God, are invaluable; grace

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and gifts, faith and natural abilities, are totally distinct. Great gifts no more impart grace nor insure salvation, than grace confers the gift of prophecy or the power of working miracles. It is probable that Judas did not come behind the Apostles in any gift: and none ever displayed greater zeal than the Pharisees.

Remember, however, that it is not he that preaches well, that converses eloquently, that prays powerfully; but he that believeth, that shall be saved. In estimating the amount of your religion, look less at the number or variety of your gifts, than at the simplicity of heart with which you rely on the atonement of Immanuel, and the purity and ardour of that affection with which you submit to his will, and cleave to his service.

2. Some involve themselves in distress from mistaking the fruits and effects of faith, for faith itself.

There are some things, such as love, humility, self-denial, and obedience to the Divine will; which enter so completely into the very essence of religion, that without them it is impossible to lay any valid claim to the christian character, or entertain any well-grounded hope of seeing the face of God in mercy. But there are other principles, such as peace, hope, and joy; which, though closely connected with the believer's comfort, and highly conducive to his spiritual improvement, are neither essential to the nature of faith nor inseparable from a state of grace. We are told that if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ he shall be accursed; and that, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: but throughout the whole compass of the sacred volume, it is never once asserted nor insinuated that, if any be without spiritual liberty, or peace, or joy, he shall not see the Lord.

If therefore you are possessed of the essential elements of the christian character, the things which accompany salvation; are you to deny the reality of your religion, because for the present you are deprived of its invaluable, but mutable, enjoyments and graces? Because a man has not the beauty of Absalom nor the strength of Samson, it does not follow that he does not belong to the species. And though your hopes may not be so high as those of

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some with whom you associate, your state may be as safe; and though their joy may be higher, your grace may be as great: for the measure of our spiritual peace is not so much in proportion to the amount of our attainments, as to the degree in which God is pleased to lift on us the light of his countenance, and to bless us with the presence and consolations of his Spirit.

3. Some deprive themselves of comfort by confounding the perfection with the degrees of faith.

Through the peculiar favour of God some are enabled to walk in the light of his countenance; to rejoice in the hope of his glory; to appropriate the blessings of the great salvation; to realize their interest in the righteousness of Immanuel; and to say, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine: this God is my God for ever and ever."

Their faith is perfect. It expels doubts; casts out fear; and makes them strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. It gives them the first-fruits of the Spirit, and a foretaste of heaven.

The possession of such a faith is invaluable. Many have attained it; and we ought never to rest till we have secured it. Some spiritually-minded christians have had their desires so strongly and intensely fixed on its acquisition, that when they found themselves unable to reach it, they have suspected that they had no grace at all.

But when throughout all the works and dispensations of the Most High, amidst objects of the same class and order, a beautiful and striking variety every where reigns; can we reasonably expect a precise uniformity amongst the followers of Christ in their faith and holiness, in their knowledge and enjoyments? Are all his children of the same age? Are all his scholars alike diligent and docile? Are all his soldiers alike courageous and skilful? With fewer years and inferior advantages are you to rival and surpass those who possess superior age and privileges? Are you to deny the reality of your religion, because it is deficient in its degrees? When corn is in the blade; are we to affirm that it has no title to the name of grain, because it is not in the ear? Are infants to be excluded from the list of the human race, because they are destitute

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of the size and strength of men? And while you love the Lord Jesus Christ supremely, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart, are you to reject the consolations of the gospel, and regard yourselves as reprobates, because you are not endowed with the faith, fortitude, and holy joy of an experienced and established believer?

Before therefore you make the deficiency of your attainments an argument that you have no religion whatever; you ought to examine if the attainments after which you aspire, may reasonably be expected from people of your years, and possessed of your advantages. The progress of christians of the same age and favoured with the same advantages, is often very unequal: and it is quite preposterous to expect the same attainments from those whose years and privileges are widely different. If you have only recently been led to lay to heart the things belonging to your peace, or if your opportunities for spiritual improvement have been unfavourable; it is too much to hope to equal some of your brethren in their acquirements, or to arrive at once at the summit of christian perfection, and the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ. It is enough that your progress corresponds to your age and privileges, even though it should be less than your wishes, and inferior to that of some of your more advanced christian acquaintances. It is absurd to look for meridian splendour at the dawn of day; or to expect the coolness and experience of a veteran in a raw recruit. And it is as unreasonable to expect in a young convert, the wisdom, faith, fortitude, and patience which have been found in aged disciples, or in the Apostles and martyrs of God. Your business is to strengthen the faith that you have; to pray God to increase it; and to persevere in the active discharge of every duty, and in the careful improvement of every privilege: for then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.

In this manner we find that many involve themselves in perplexity and trouble from mistaking the nature of faith, and the foundation of spiritual consolation. They confound it with some of its fruits and effects, with some of its accessaries and appendages. They complain of

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the weakness of faith, when the real cause of their distress is their want of religious comfort and of great spiritual gifts and graces.

It must be observed,

II. That faith, though weak, may be real and saving.

That this is the case will appear by shewing that strong faith is a relative term, so that what in one situation may be denominated strong faith, may in another be considered as weak; that faith is sometimes strongest when the believer suspects that it is weakest; that the promise of salvation is attached to sound and genuine, as well as to strong and lively faith; and that many kind and gracious encouragements are given to feeble and drooping, timid and disconsolate believers.

1. Strong faith is a relative term, so that what in one situation may be denominated strong faith, may in another be considered as weak.

Christians are placed in very different circumstances. They have various duties to fulfil; and are required to pass through very unequal scenes of joy and sorrow, of suffering and of comfort. Some are called to teach, and others to be taught: some are fixed in public stations, and have to act a conspicuous and important part in life; others occupy a lower place, and move in a more obscure and limited sphere. Some are favoured with prosperity, and others are visited with adversity. One is wafted along with a gentle breeze, and all around him is bright and inviting: another is compelled, to make his way amongst rocks and quicksands, and contend with all the violence of the storm and tumult of the ocean.

Now since it is the Lord who selects the situations which we occupy, and prescribes the duties which we are to discharge; since it is he who appoints our trials, and administers our comforts; it is reasonable to expect that his communications will be suited to our need, and proportioned to the services which he demands and the sufferings which he inflicts. Whilst therefore those whose labours are more difficult and hazardous, and whose troubles are more complicated and severe, have encour-

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agement to expect a plentiful supply of faith and fortitude; those who are beset with fewer dangers, and exposed to less painful privations, have no warrant to insist on the possession of the same measure of supernatural aid.

Whilst therefore you are complaining of the weakness or want of faith, your complaints may be altogether groundless. Your faith may be weaker than that of many, and yet be of the operation of God. You may neither be visited with the same calamities, nor summoned to the same painful and perilous services to which they are called. Though therefore your faith is far less than what is requisite for them, it may be enough for you.—The very men whom, perhaps, you are envying for their strong faith and heavenly fortitude, may find that they possess no more than what is absolutely necessary for the labour in which they are engaged, and the sufferings to which they are subjected. They who gathered much of the manna had nothing over; and they who gathered little had no lack. By that precious promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee," God assures the feeblest amongst his people of what is necessary for their support: but the strongest will find that they have no strength to spare, for their duties and trials will be multiplied in proportion. It is not requisite that every seaman should be endowed with the talents of an admiral, nor that every soldier should possess the military science of a commander. It is enough that each enjoys what is proper for the duties of his own place. And however desirable eminent gifts and great grace may be, are you to repine because you are not enriched with all the spiritual endowments that blessed and ennobled the most illustrious servants of God?

Though you cannot at present rejoice in the Lord as your God; be thankful for faith to cleave to him, and to enable you affectionately and steadily to fulfil the labours of your station. Wait on him, and keep his way. What is good he will give. When your duties multiply or your sufferings abound, he will increase your strength and enlarge your consolations. But he is a God of order, and performs his promises only in their season. He gives us grace to strengthen us for labour, when we are called to

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active duty; comforting grace he vouchsafes in a time of trouble; and dying grace he reserves for a dying day. Though therefore you may not be possessed of all the faith which you wish, be glad that you enjoy what you need.

The same believer has different degrees of faith at different times. Paul, who on one occasion could do all things; on another despaired even of life. Job, who at one time declared though God slay me, yet will I trust in him; upon another imagined that God had become his enemy. And David too, who would not fear though a host should encamp against him; afterwards said, I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul.

2. Faith is sometimes strongest when the believer suspects that it is weakest.

The christian and the formalist, or self-deceiver, are completely the reverse of each other. Whenever he possesses peace, the self-deceiver fancies that his faith is sound and genuine. He has no attacks from Satan: for while the strong man armed keepeth the house, his goods are in peace. He has no disturbance from the remains of corruption: for while dead in sins, there is nothing within him to make him sensible of his wretched and ruined situation. He has no grief for the want of Divine consolations: for while his soul never tasted the blessedness inspired by their presence, their absence can excite no painful regrets. And having no grace which can be tried; he is a stranger to the severe and harassing exercises of faith and patience to which many of the children of God are exposed. There is little to interrupt his tranquillity: and from this fatal calm; which is most alarming to a spiritual mind, because it marks a soul forsaken of God and abandoned to utter destruction; the infatuated man draws the most preposterous conclusions. Because he has no fears, he imagines that he has mighty faith; and that his condition must be without danger, because he is free from disturbance.

But no sooner is a man brought into a state of grace, than he encounters much to try his faith and fortitude. Satan will assault him. Though he keeps his own quar-

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ters quiet, he makes many an effort to storm the camp of his foes: and even where final success is hopeless, his disappointed pride and malignant cruelty will lead him to harass those whom he cannot destroy. Having now a law in his mind, he becomes sensitively alive to every movement of the law in his members: and loving God with his whole heart, and longing to exalt the name of Jesus above every name; he is mortified and grieved to find that he cannot do the things that he would, and that he can undertake and accomplish so little in the work in which he supremely delights. Having found life in the favour of God, and experienced that his loving-kindness is better than life; the hidings of the Divine countenance and the loss of spiritual consolation pierce his heart and afflict his soul. To enlarge and confirm his faith God is pleased to exercise and try it; sometimes by worldly crosses, sometimes by the delay of promised mercies, and at other times by seeming to disregard his petition and his cry.

Look now at the christian in such circumstances; assailed by temptations which he hates, harassed with the stirrings of depravity which his soul abhors, deprived of the blessings which he so highly values, and subjected to such a severe trial of his religious principles; and say, if he now can be possessed of peace, and able to maintain an unshaken confidence and an elevating joy? He may sometimes be ready to sink into despair: but whilst he vigorously resists the attacks by which he is annoyed; and determines, that if he must perish, he shall die at his Master's feet: can you say, though his comfort has fled, that his faith has failed? and that along with the loss of his spiritual peace, he has also renounced his allegiance to his heavenly King? The man who falls in the defence of his country, is perhaps possessed of more love to his country than many who are residing in the mansions of the great or feasting at the table of the president. And there is frequently as much faith in the heart of the christian, who, when all things seem to be against him, cleaves firmly to the Lord; as in the heart of that believer who is

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walking in the light of God's countenance, and rejoicing in hope of his glory.

3. The promise of salvation is not confined to strong and lively faith, but extends to all that is sound and living.

Our faith can never be too strong nor lively. We never can rest too simply, nor rely too confidently, on the word of a true and faithful God. We never can place too great dependence on an almighty and infinite Saviour: nor apply and appropriate too fully the rich and inexhaustible provisions of the everlasting gospel. For all things are ours; and the more cordially that we embrace them, and the more largely we enjoy them; we not only promote more effectually our own best interests, but also do the greater honour to the generosity and truth of the God of grace.

But if nothing but a strong and lively faith can save us, what is to become of the weak brother for whom Christ died? Where shall the faint and those who have no might appear? Why are we commanded not to despise the day of small things? and told that the strength of Christ is made perfect in our weakness? If every believer must possess the same amount of faith, and be alike strong in that grace; there could be no weak members in the family of Christ, nor any occasion for promises of encouragement and support to the feeble, the drooping, and disconsolate.

The object which God requires, and which will ensure our salvation in the great day of decision, is not strong but genuine faith. The strongest faith cannot save by its own intrinsic power or worth, but entirely by uniting the soul to Jesus, and giving it an interest in his righteousness. There is salvation in no other. Without the redemption of Christ, there could have been no object for faith to fix on. And if men still neglect his righteousness: they may exert themselves as they please to believe; they may cling ever so tenaciously to the opinions which they form, and the delusions which they adopt; but after all they must perish.

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And as the firmest faith is absolutely unprofitable except by leading the soul to rely simply on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; the feeblest faith, that rests on his all-sufficient merits, renders its possessor just as safe as the strongest. Our interest in a gift depends, not upon the manner in which we embrace it, but on the manner in which it is conferred. The sick man, who can merely express his acceptance of the kindness of his benefactor, is just as much entitled to its use, as the sturdiest who can vigorously grasp the favour. On shipboard a giant is sustained, and carried forward, not by his own bulk and vigour, but by the strength and motion of the vessel: and every infant there is just as safe, and as rapidly propelled, as he. And in religion, the strongest faith can do no more than unite the soul to Jesus; and the weakest faith, if genuine, does no less.

If your faith has led you to renounce all dependence upon your own wisdom and worth, to rest on Christ alone for righteousness and strength; however feeble and imperfect you may deem it, it is sufficient to bear up the whole weight of your eternal interests. Faith, no stronger than that, has already landed thousands in the world of glory. And if you are possessed of such faith, you have all the security which the word of an almighty and faithful God can give you, for your own everlasting happiness. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." It is not said that he who has faith to cast out devils, to remove mountains, to subdue kingdoms, to overcome the world, to abound in hope, to rejoice in anticipation of eternal glory, but he that believeth, shall be saved.

A few grapes prove that the tree on which they grow is a vine, and neither a bramble nor a thorn. A few flowers or leaves show that the plant is alive. A breath or sigh indicates that the patient, however exhausted, is not dead. And a faith which makes the soul cleave to the Saviour and tremble at his word, demonstrates the presence of grace in the heart as completely, as when it rises up into a calm and settled assurance, and enables its possessor to appropriate and apply all the rich and inexhaustible blessings of the great salvation.

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4. The most kind and encouraging promises of assistance and acceptance are given to the weak in faith.

The shepherd is most concerned for the feeble in his flock; and the parent for the sick and languishing in his family. And the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls has shown the most deep and lively solicitude for the safety and comfort of the timid, the dejected, and desponding. His charge to Peter was, to feed his lambs. He enjoins ministers to strengthen the weak hands and to confirm the feeble knees; to say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense: he will come and save you. Ages before his appearance, it was foretold that a bruised reed he should not break, and smoking flax he should not quench. He commenced his ministry by declaring, The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted. He pronounces blessings not only on those who are strong in faith, rich in grace, and full of spiritual joy; but also on the poor in spirit, on those that mourn, and that hunger and thirst for righteousness. He feeds his flock as a shepherd; gathers the lambs with his arm, carries them in his bosom; and gently leads those that are with young. He seeks that which was lost; brings again that which was driven away; strengthens the weak, and binds up that which is broken. He makes his grace sufficient for us; and perfects his strength in our weakness.

What is the meaning of all this, but saying in plain terms; that, wherever there is a spiritual and gracious principle implanted in the heart, it will not be overlooked, destroyed, nor lost; but protected, strengthened, and confirmed, till made meet for eternal glory.

Whenever, therefore, you are apprehensive that your state is dangerous because your faith is weak, your wisdom is to search more for the evidences of its reality than of its strength. In sickness, though the patient is without present vigour, it is encouraging to find the symptoms of returning health. And in a state of religious languor and despondence, it is delightful to be able to discover

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the proofs of a sound and genuine, though not of a lively and overcoming faith. Has your faith led you to submit to the Saviour, and to yield a cordial obedience to his laws? Has it brought you to rest on him as all your salvation and all your desire? If it has: then you may see your calling and election of God. He who is great, has done great things for you. And having begun a good work in you, he will perform it unto the day of Christ.

For a season you may be unable to realize your high privileges. But hold fast that which you have. Wait on the Lord and keep his way. Cast not away the beginning of your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward: for he is faithful who hath promised, who also will do it. Though your beginning is small, your latter end shall greatly increase. The most majestic oak was once an acorn. The mightiest river when traced to its source, is found to be but a diminutive stream. And what was the most illustrious saint that ever blessed the church on earth, or entered the world of glory, at the commencement of his career, but a babe in Christ? Give, therefore, earnest heed to the things belonging to your peace. Strive to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and you also shall be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. Christ will dwell in your hearts by faith; till being rooted and grounded in love, you shall be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.

If, therefore, that faith which in one situation or character is regarded as strong, may in another be considered as weak; if faith is sometimes strongest, when the believer suspects that it is weakest; if the promise of salvation is annexed, not to strong and lively, but to real and living faith; and if the most kind and animating assurances of assistance and acceptance are given to the weak in faith; then, if you have evidence that your faith is real, though far from possessing all the strength that you wish, you

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have reason to rejoice, and to apply to yourselves the consolations and hopes of the gospel.

But whilst these things are mentioned for the encouragement of the humble and timid, who are ready to suspect from the weakness of their faith, that they have no grace at all: remember that it can administer no comfort to any who are willing to remain in such a state of languor and debility. What would you think of the sick man, who is glad that he is alive, but gives himself no concern for the recovery of his health? of the merchant, who, while struggling with all the embarrassments of bankruptcy and poverty, is delighted that he is out of jail, but makes no effort to secure wealth and independence? And can we regard that professor as a sound and genuine christian, who is satisfied because he fancies that he possesses the root and principle of the divine life, whilst he makes no exertion to be strong in faith, and to abound in the fruits of righteousness and in the joys and comforts of the Holy Ghost? The most active and industrious man alive may be siezed with indisposition, and prevented for a time from pursuing his ordinary avocations: but he has no love for his malady nor any wish for its continuance. The most pious, zealous, and heavenly-minded believer may labour under occasional languor and infirmity: but this is not a state in which he would willingly remain. He resists these attacks of drowsiness and indifference. He endeavours to shake off his torpor and inactivity. He forgets the things that are behind, and reaches forth unto those things that are before. And if you have any genuine acquaintance with the truth as it is in Jesus, your religion will operate in a similar manner. You will be grieved and ashamed on account of your infirmities and imperfections. You will every day be engaged in fervent prayer and strenuous efforts, to become more watchful, humble, spiritual, and holy. For the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The righteous holdeth on his way, and he that hath clean hands waxeth stronger and stronger.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

"Arise, my soul, from deep distress,
And banish every fear;
God calls thee to his throne of grace,
To spread thy sorrows there."

Since faith enters so materially into all the duties and enjoyments of the Christian life; and since our happiness and holiness depend so much upon its strength and liveliness; it is an object of great importance to know by what means it may be most effectually established and maintained in the soul, and endowed with the most steady and commanding influence over the mind. For this purpose it is necessary to add,

III. A few directions to those who are weak in faith.

I. Pore not upon the difficulties and dangers of your situation, but look directly to the perfect and adorable character of that God who invites your trust.

Sense and reason are weak and cowardly. The range of their observation is low and contracted, and the amount of their resources is limited and paltry. They magnify every real difficulty; and frequently increase our embarrassments and fears, by conjuring up ideal dangers. They tremble at the shaking of a leaf; and maintain that every new and unknown trouble is utterly insupportable and absolutely destructive. They tell us that this sin can never be forgiven, that this corruption never

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can be subdued, that this duty never can be fulfilled, nor that trial endured.

If, therefore, you listen to their suggestions, you never can be established, nor blessed with settled and composing rest. You will be like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

But if you will withdraw your ears from their dark and revolting representations, and fix your eye on the wisdom and grace of Him who gave the promises, and whose power and faithfulness are engaged to make them good: where is there an enemy that can shake your confidence, or an event that ought to disturb your peace?

Your path may be intricate. You may be unable to discover any issue from your perplexities and troubles. But because it is hid from your view, is it concealed from the all-penetrating eye of the Omniscient? He knows the close, as thoroughly as the commencement of your trials. He sees the end from the beginning. His wisdom is unsearchable. His understanding is infinite.—And though you cannot, he knows well how to deliver the godly out of temptation.

Your guilt may be great and your corruptions dreadful. But has he not laid your help on one mighty to save? has not Jesus finished transgression, and made an end of sin? Is there any passion so strong and turbulent, that his almighty arm is unable to reduce it to subjection? any corruption so inveterate that he cannot eradicate? or any guilt too great for him, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, to wash away? If they would only take refuge there, there is strength sufficient behind the shield of his atonement, to defend a whole apostate universe from the visitations of almighty vengeance. How much more then must he possess the power, upon your humble contrite application, to forgive all your sins, and grant your salvation with eternal glory?

Your enemies may be restless and rancorous, and your dangers apparently insurmountable and overwhelming. But is there any thing too hard for the Lord? He speaks, and it is done: he commands, and all things stand fast. He doeth whatsoever pleaseth him in heaven, and in

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earth, and in all deep places. Take a survey of the extent of creation; think of the magnificence and grandeur of the unnumbered worlds, moving with such majestic stateliness and unbroken steadiness in the vast expanse that encircles us: and say, can any thing be too difficult for him who formed the whole by a word, and sustains them all by the mere act of his will? The wide universe, however, is far from being the measure of his strength. It is a mere specimen of his power. Were it, at this moment, swept from the face of being, he could the next moment replace it, by another ineffably more large and stupendous: for he is able not only to repeat all that he has already done, but to outdo all the former displays of his wisdom and might. There is no searching of his understanding, and his power is almighty.

Whenever, therefore, you are brought into distress and trouble; whenever you are deprived of the created supports of your courage and the usual sources of your joy; it is the height of folly to fasten your eye upon the difficulties and dangers of your condition, or upon the greatness and the value of the blessings which you need. Your wisdom is to summon faith instantly to your assistance, and to lean entirely upon the Lord. By poring upon the formidable appearances in your situation, you may aggravate all your sufferings, and involve yourselves in deeper perplexity and dismay. But if you look at once beyond all your own weakness and unworthiness, your own trials and distresses, to the wisdom, the power, the grace, and faithfulness of the God of love; in him you will find more than a match for all your difficulties, and an antidote for all your fears. If you were called to encounter your troubles, and discharge your duties in your own strength; if, when assailed with temptation and beset with danger, you had no higher saviour than a created arm; you might justly sink into despondence, or give way to despair. But when, by the eye of faith, you are carried through the thick and cloudy atmosphere of affliction and sorrow, transported beyond the narrow bounds of sense and reason, and fixed directly in the contemplation of Immanuel's all-sufficient sacrifice and the power and

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faithfulness of an infinite God: what can overturn your trust or excite your alarm?

If, in his advanced years, when a son was promised him, Abraham had thought only on his own age and that of Sarah; or if, at the Red Sea, when assured of a passage through the deep, Moses had attended merely to the operation of second causes; they would have had reason to have hesitated, and to have cried, How can these things be? But by looking at the power of the great Promiser, what was the consequence? Every shade of doubt and apprehension was dissipated; and they felt the most perfect certainty in the accomplishment of his word. They staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but were strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was also able to perform. And if, in the day of your distress, you persist in asking, How you shall weather the storm of adversity? bear the weight of your trials? secure the supply of your wants? or obtain the salvation of your souls? you will only augment the pressure of your burdens, and deepen the horrors of the gloom by which you are surrounded. But if you will dismiss the suspicions of sense, and adopt the arguments of faith; light will spring up in darkness, and you shall soon rise superior to all your trepidation and dejection. Faith will teach you to reason on this wise, What hath God said? Has he engaged to pardon my sins? to heal my backslidings? to subdue mine iniquities? to supply all my need? to support me under every trouble? to deliver me from every evil? and at last to save my soul, and introduce me into eternal glory? Has an almighty and covenant-keeping God spoken all this in his holiness? Then I will rejoice. A man might deceive me; an angel might fail me; but with the Lord upon my side, whom need I fear? If he be for me, who can be against me? His love is as great as his power: and he never has uttered one kind encouraging word without the will and determination to make it good.

But you perhaps will tell me, that "you have no doubt of the power of the Most High. You know that he can

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do all things, neither is there any thing too hard for him. But the question is, What has he promised? His power was as great when the angels fell, as when Jesus was bearing our sins on Calvary; and it is as great when sinners take their descent to perdition, as when the angels of light raise their hymn of triumph over the admission of a soul to glory." Let me then entreat you,

2. To study the promises of his word, and fix your faith on what they reveal.

A man of integrity and wealth will honour every draft that he gives: but he will indignantly spurn the idea of being answerable for every demand that fraud and avarice, without his knowledge or permission, shall presume to make upon his banker.

Jehovah has passed his word to walk in the path of his promises, and to regulate the dispensations of his providence by the declarations of his grace. To the men of the world, the Bible appears an insignificant and contemptible volume; far less interesting and useful than the trash and scum of the daily press. But to a man, whose mind is enlightened by faith and his heart purified by the influences of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is invaluable. It is the charter of his salvation. It is the security of all his hopes, and the pledge of the affection and faithfulness of the God of love. It contains exceeding great and precious promises. No words can express, nor any mind conceive their excellence and grandeur. Though you had possessed the command of the heart of the Most High and all the resources of Omnipotence; you could not have placed better, richer, greater, nobler blessings in the covenant of peace, than what the Father of mercies has spontaneously planted there. Pardon, righteousness and strength; grace and glory; every thing requisite for your safety and happiness in time, and for your dignity and delight through eternity; are all lodged in this revelation of Divine generosity, and conveyed along with the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

And whilst these promises are exceedingly great and

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infinitely precious; they are all absolutely and infallibly true and certain. For they are all founded in the purpose of Him, whose nature is unchangeable, and supported by the power of Him, whose might is irresistible. The least promise is not below the notice of the God who gave it; and the greatest is not beyond the reach of Him who grasps creation in his span, and wields at pleasure all the elements of nature.

But whilst his faithfulness stands committed to fulfil the promises which he has given; remember that he has nowhere bound himself to regulate his proceedings according to the dictates of sense and reason, nor to fashion them according to our fancies and humours. If he had given any notice of such a design; then we should have had great cause indeed to have been alarmed whenever events occurred contrary to our expectations and wishes. But since, instead of any such intimation, he has on the contrary expressly reserved to himself the right of following the course of his own promises: what ground have we for uneasiness or fear, as long as he continues to move within the safe and sacred limits fixed by his own wisdom and published in his own word?

In order therefore to strengthen your faith, and secure the hope and comfort which in every situation, he graciously encourages you to entertain; labour to become familiar with the nature and extent of the promises, and learn the blessed art of applying them to your own varying duties, wants, and trials. Much of the unbelief that abounds in the world, and of the doubt and despondence that prevails in the church, arises from ignorance of what God has revealed. Did Christians only know the things that are freely given them of God could they question his generosity, or cherish any suspicions of his faithfulness? And did even the worldly know the matchless perfections and infinite loveliness of his character, they would find it almost impossible to withhold their hearts from his possession, and their time and strength from his service.

If you desire to enjoy settled peace and make great spiritual progress, you must contemplate him as he has

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revealed himself in the oracles of truth. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. No man can become learned or wise by a mere wish, or mental effort. To obtain learning or wisdom, he must study the principles of knowledge, and carefully employ the means for improving his powers and storing his mind with useful information. And faith is strengthened and increased not by any abstract effort to believe, but by a growing acquaintance with the certainty, the excellence and the glory of the truths published in scripture. Where these truths are unknown or disregarded, there can be no faith at all. But if you knew their real worth, and were thoroughly convinced of the high authority from which they come; you would be constrained to admire their magnitude and grandeur, and to rely on their unquestionable and everlasting verity. The blessings which they reveal are immense, and exactly suited to your need. But they are neither too great for the hand of Omnipotence to bestow, nor too mighty for his faithfulness to fulfil. Whilst, therefore, they contain what you supremely value, and are given freely by the God of truth: if you clearly understood their nature, and were persuaded of their reality, could you refrain from embracing them as all your salvation and all your desire? or refuse to rest on them as the foundation of your present hopes, and pledge of your never-ending blessedness?

The faith which is founded upon the word of God can never rise too high, nor be subjected to too great a pressure. The base is as broad as the desires of an immortal, firm as Omnipotence, and capable of sustaining a fabric lofty as heaven and lasting as eternity. But no edifice can be stronger than the foundation on which it is reared. Rocks piled on snow or sand, though secured by bands of iron, will give way. And faith that does not simply rest on the word of God; though held with all the tenacity of death, in the time of trial, and in the day of decision, will most miserably fail. But the building placed on a rock will stand. And the faith that is fixed on the word of God, on the Rock of ages, no convulsion can shake, nor any length of time destroy.

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In proportion, therefore, as you value lively hope and lasting peace, be careful to familiarize your minds with the truths of revelation, and to secure clear and comprehensive views of their nature and design. Ponder thoroughly the magnitude and grandeur of the blessings which they promise; the freeness with which they are bestowed; and the infallible security with which they are all supported. The more fully you understand their meaning and extent, and the high authority on which they are founded; the more will your heart be charmed with their excellence and glory, and led to rely more simply and unreservedly upon their absolute truth and unfailing certainty. Your faith will increase in proportion as you grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: and when you know him fully, you will be able to rest on him unreservedly, and to trust in him wholly. But whilst your views of his character and worth are dark and confused, and your ideas of the doctrines of his word are partial and contracted; your faith can neither be firm, nor your comfort steady. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established: believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper."

The man who, without a deposit, goes to a banker with a draft, acts the part of a fool, and exposes himself to derision. The man who counterfeits the signature of another, is a forger, and exposes himself to death. The man too who disregards the word of God, and substitutes his own opinions and fancies in its room, is deluded and misled, and trusts to what can never bring him the smallest profit. And the man who knowingly and deliberately contradicts, perverts, or corrupts the scriptures, is a daring rebel against the authority of the Most High, and subjects himself to everlasting vengeance. But as every additional draft from a man of wealth, is so much clear gain; every fresh discovery that we can make of the meaning of the promises, and every new application that we can obtain of their blessings, is a pure accession to our spiritual treasures, and an unexpected addition to our best and dearest joys. The promises are all exceeding great and precious. Though we never can complete-

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ly ascertain their whole worth; still the longer we study them, and the more fully we comprehend them, we shall be more and more charmed with their matchless and unsearchable excellencies, and rest the more firmly on their unchanging truth and everlasting certainty.

If therefore you wish to enjoy strong and lively faith, and to possess settled and lasting peace; search the scriptures, and let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. To this it must be added,

3. Pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is his gift. Men may talk as they please about the force of reason and the omnipotence of truth. Right reason, indeed, ought to be strong, and truth never can be too mighty. But what can truth avail when presented to the prejudiced? or reason, when urged upon the idiot or the insane?

In every word and syllable of scripture there are everlasting truth and righteousness. But can these move the feelings of a corrupt heart, or conquer the enmity of a carnal mind? There are infinite loveliness and glory in the ever-blessed God. But can these attract the admiration of Satan, or excite the esteem and affection of the secure and careless of the sons of Adam? So far from raising their reverence or commanding their love, these attributes rouse the disgust and hatred of the impenitent and hardened.

And with all the truth and grace which the scriptures contain, there are seasons when the most humble and spiritually-minded Christians can derive no comfort from these wells of salvation. They believe what these lively oracles reveal. They wish to feel their elevating and liberaliizng power, and to enjoy their sublime and ineffable consolations. But they cannot. They renounce whatever opposes their influence, and resist whatever the scriptures condemn. But after all they reap no sensible advantage from their belief and labours. The word is without power. The ordinances are without profit. Their heart lies in their breast as cold and hard as a stone. But the Almighty Spirit can not only draw out the truth and

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riches of the scriptures, but also open our hearts to receive them. He can not only put life into the ordinances, and render the word quick and powerful, but also put life into our hearts, and endow us with the capacity to relish and enjoy the blessings which they disclose.

It is his office to glorify the Father, to testify of Jesus, and to take of the things of Christ and shew them unto the soul.

But without his teaching, the light may shine around us, and yet shine in vain: every truth in revelation may be presented to our contemplation, and yet remain dark, unintelligible, and unprofitable. The Bible is always the same: but what different impressions does it produce on different minds, and even on the same mind at different times. The scriptures which the Jews and the Christians study, to a certain extent, coincide; those which were in the hands of Caiaphas and Paul, were identically the same: but what a contrast in the result that followed their perusal! And even in the case of the same individual, the effect attending the reading of the sacred volume at one time, could not be more unlike that which accompanies it at another, even though the Bible with which we are familiar were annihilated, and a new one substituted in its room.

But whilst we have the greatest need of his teaching, this invaluable blessing is graciously promised upon our application. Without limitation or reserve, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Under the guidance of this Almighty Agent, is any duty too difficult; or any blessing too high or precious to be attainable? With the whole universe at his disposal, nothing is too hard for him. He can work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. He can lead you into all truth: impart to you an unction whereby you

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shall understand all things: give your hearts to believe and love the discoveries of Scripture, and to rest with calmness and assurance on that adorable and all-sufficient Redeemer whom they reveal. Learn then to implore his assistance, and to submit unreservedly to his direction.

When, therefore, you consider the character of God who invites your trust; the security which he has given for your confidence; and the power of that blessed Agent, who, in answer to prayer, is promised to work faith in your hearts, and to perfect what concerns you: let me, in the close of what has been said, entreat you to guard vigilantly against a spirit of unbelief. It is a common, a besetting, but a ruinous sin. Men are very backward to rely on the testimony of God, not because there is any thing difficult or unreasonable in the exercise of faith; but because their minds are alienated from the love of God, and engrossed with secular cares and the most trifling and contemptible pursuits.

In other things, where the subject is far more mysterious and incomprehensible than any proposition within the whole compass of revelation, men exercise faith without the least scruple or reluctance. It seems to be only in matters of religion, where the greatest security has been given, where every truth has been fortified by evidence the most irresistible, and where distrust and fear are most preposterous and unfounded, that the human mind is divested of its natural resolution and confidence, and becomes the slave of the most distracting doubts, and of the most distressing alarm and terror.

A man will fearlessly take possession of a gift bestowed by the generosity of an absent friend, though he himself has done nothing to gain it; and will coolly sit down in the enjoyment of a title and estate won by the talents and virtues of his ancestors, though he himself has not contributed to their acquisition or transmission. But the honours secured by the toils, and the immense inheritance in grace and in glory freely bequeathed by the death of our elder Brother and Lord, his people are terrified to claim and occupy. Notwithstanding all the liberal and unrestricted invitations of the Gospel, by which

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every child of Adam is encouraged and exhorted to embrace the glorious salvation which it brings; and notwithstanding all the overpowering demonstrations of the sincerity of the Most High in these proclamations of his grace · it is seldom, among the many thousands where these blessed tidings are most affectionately and forcibly published, that one is found who cordially believes them, and who boldly embarks his eternal all on their reality. Amidst the greatest tenderness and vehemence with which these truths are stated and urged, few give themselves any concern about the matter; and, amongst the few who lay it to heart at all, the greater part continue to be haunted and harassed with apprehensions respecting the possibility of salvation through grace, and the faithfulness of God in performing his promises. If they had any visible or tangible ground for their dependence, it would be perfectly easy and reasonable to cherish the hope of eternal life. If they were required to work out a righteousness of their own; to occupy themselves in keeping the commandments; and by their alms, their prayers, and other moral and religious performances, to contribute something to the service of God and the benefit of society, they fancy that they would then possess a valid claim to the kingdom of heaven; and having thus won, they might then safely entertain the expectation of wearing the crown of life. But to renounce all their own righteousness, to abandon all dependence on their moral duties and religious exercises, to place their undivided trust and reliance upon the worth of another, upon the obedience and sufferings of one whom they have never seen, and who is beyond the reach of all mortal vision: they regard as extremely dangerous, and almost as irrational and absurd, as to expect to stem the tide by a word, or to repel the attacks of disease and death by the enclosures of a fortress.

Now, to those who are seriously concerned about their everlasting welfare; and who, notwithstanding the firm foundation which is laid in the gospel for the free, complete, and eternal justification of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, are still labouring under a spirit of fear

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and despondence about the safety of their souls, and the warrant afforded for their hopes by this plan of unsearchable boundless mercy; I must say that the security given in the Scriptures for the salvation of those who embrace the gospel is absolute and complete, and at least as firm and ample as that which the God of nature has given for the uniformity and permanence of those laws which regulate the phenomena of the material world.

Carry back your inquiries into the causes of things, and say, what is there more difficult or mysterious in the doctrine of salvation by grace, of justification through the righteousness of Christ; than what we witness in the occurrences of every day, and contemplate without the slightest emotion of astonishment or wonder? What gives food its nourishing properties, or medicine its healing powers? What gives vegetation to grain, and as the seasons roll round, brinks on the plenteous weeks of harvest? The husbandman commits his seed to the earth. He gives himself no more solicitude about the matter: and indeed, though he were to torment himself with care, he could neither quicken nor retard the result, nor in the smallest degree affect the steps of the operation. "He sleeps and rises night and day, and seed springs and grows up, he knows not how: for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The earth and the planets around us, are in constant motion. But we see not the process. No eye has yet detected the wheels on which the mighty fabric rolls, nor seen the strong and steady hand which turns the silent spheres. We cannot obstruct their advance, accelerate their velocity, nor exert any control over their movements. But does this ignorance of the means by which their courses are carried on, or this inability to guide and influence their motions; injure our happiness and peace, disorder our secular plans and pursuits, break in upon our hours of rest, or disturb our nightly slumbers? No. Assured that the Most High, sitting behind the elements which he has formed, keeps his eye intent on the universe which he has made, sends his all-pervading Spirit across the immensity of space,

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and by the word of his power sustains and governs the whole, and, till the light and darkness shall come to an end, will maintain unaltered their appointed revolutions, and preserve them all from ruin and derangement; we give ourselves no uneasiness respecting the matter, but walk about our ordinary employments and amusements with all the calmness and confidence which the protection of Omnipotence can inspire.

But why all this coolness and composure in a case where we have nothing for our security and safety but the mere will of God? And why all your apprehensions, trepidation, and distraction in matters of salvation, where you have all the certainty for your faith, and all the security for your safety, which the power and faithfulness of the same Almighty God can afford you?

Will you say, that "religion is employed about things that are spiritual and invisible?" But is this any reason why we should reject its comforts and distrust its truths, any more than the evidence which is presented to our senses, and made a subject of observation and experiment? Is that God, who is a Spirit, less able to exert his authority over the spiritual than over the material world? Is he less able to communicate impressions of his presence and power over the regions of intellect than of sense? Are the laws that govern the phenomena in the material universe more visible and palpable, than those which direct the operations of mind? Take a farmer, a physician, or astronomer by the hand; and desire them to travel back a few steps in their respective walks; and you shall find that they soon reach the confines of knowledge and certainty, and that the basis of their belief and practice is as much out of sight as your own. Why seed-corn should grow, and produce a crop any more than sand or pebbles; unless such originally was the will of God, the husbandman with all his skill and experience cannot tell. Why opium should possess an intoxicating and soporific power, any more than snow or water; unless such has been the will of God, the physician with all his study and practice is ultimately unable to inform us. And why the earth and orbs around move at all, or move with the velocity

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which they possess; unless such has been the appointment of the Creator and Lord of the universe; the astronomer, with the penetration of the loftiest intellect, and the science and observation of the longest life, is unable to explain.

Now, in these and in a thousand other cases, is the simple will or appointment of the Most High an ample warrant for your security? Then what more than this can you possibly ask for the foundation of your trust or the source of your joy in the subject of your salvation? Have the husbandman, the physician, or astronomer, a more firm and substantial foundation for their confidence than you? Is the chain which binds the effect to the cause, more strong and visible in the natural than in the moral world? Or has the God, who possesses the management of matter, more authority and power, than the God who reigns over the spiritual universe and exercises the supreme dominion in the kingdom of grace? And shall men fearlessly rely on the unbroken connexion, which he has in the material world established betwixt cause and effect? and yet, after he has, in a manner so affecting and solemn, pledged his sincerity and truth in the promises of his word; shall you continue to cherish doubts and apprehensions respecting their fulfilment?

You may perhaps tell me, "that this comparison is not fair: that in the business of life, and in the study of nature we have observation and experience for our guide; and that though the cause may be invisible, yet since the effect is fully and distinctly manifest, we are able from the latter not only to infer the existence of the former, but likewise to reason far upon its operation and efficiency."

But pray, have we no observation nor experience to direct us in matters of religion? to corroborate the testimony of Scripture? and give certainty and stability to the anticipations of faith? Look at the case of Abraham. He was called to live by faith. Blessings completely beyond the reach of nature, and far above his expectations, were promised. In his old age, he was assured that he and Sarah should have a son: and, when a solitary wanderer in Canaan, and utterly unable to assert a

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claim to a single inch of the soil, he was told that his posterity should inherit the whole. Now did any of these promises fail? Whose son was Isaac? And where had the Jews their residence for two thousand years? Noah was informed that he and his family should be preserved, when the other inhabitants of the world should be drowned. And can there be any dispute whether he and his family escaped the deluge? To Paul it was intimated that he and the company that sailed with him in his perilous voyage to Rome, amidst all the dangers and disasters of the deep, should have their lives given them for a prey. And were they not all brought safe to land? It was long ago announced that the law should go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; that Jesus should have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth; that he should be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and that to him should the gathering of the people be. And have these words taken no effect? Has the Gospel not been published in the islands of the seas, and found its way to the remotest regions of the world? Is it not still extending its triumphs, and on its way to visit and to bless all the nations of the globe? Amidst all the judgments with which the Jews were threatened for rejecting the Messiah; still they were told, that, though God would make a full end of the nations among whom they were scattered, he would not make a full end of them. And has this promise been fulfilled or forgotten? Have the Jews been swept off from the face of the earth? or incorporated with the nations among whom they sojourned? They have been scattered and peeled, trodden under foot, and made a taunt and a proverb among the nations. But while their conquerors have been subdued by others in their turn, and the victors and the vanquished so completely blended, that no vestige of their original extraction can be discovered; to the present day, in all the places of their dispersion, the Jews remain a peculiar people, and are as completely distinguished by their national characteristics, as when settled in Canaan, and peacefully observing the institutions of their fathers.

All this looks like observation, lending its testimony

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to illustrate and verify the averments of scripture. But we may bring the matter nearer home, and render it a subject of experience.

In the Bible it is written, "There is no peace to the wicked: the way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble; and they who hate wisdom," religion, "love death." Now, ask the unregenerate if they do not feel within themselves something like the accomplishment of these declarations. Are they perfectly easy and comfortable in their irreligious course? Have they no remorse in reflecting upon the past, nor any alarm in looking forward to the future? Do they never find their hopes blasted, and their schemes defeated? Do they never look for much when it comes to little, and find a canker in their possessions, which consumes the best of their substance? What explanation can you give of this, unless it be that it is the justice of the Most High, watching over the interests of his government; and faithfully fulfilling the threatenings of his word against the secure, the worldly, and the carnal; and forcing upon the consciences of every succeeding generation of transgressors, the conviction that verily there is a reward to the wicked, verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth?

If you know the grace of Christ, then I must put the question, Do you not experience the performance of the precious promises with which the word of truth is stored? It is there said, "Ask, and ye shall receive: seek, and ye shall find." And have you never found, to your delightful, joyful experience, that God is the hearer of prayer; that before you called, he answered; and while you were yet speaking, he heard you; that he has presented you with the blessings of goodness, and exceeded your utmost petitions and requests? In his word he says, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: as thy day is, so shall thy strength be." Now, are these declarations true, or false? What is the testimony of your own experience on the subject? When involved in trouble, when deep has called unto deep, when the proud waves have gone over your head, and when to your apprehension and that of every spectator, your distress

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seemed insupportable, and your destruction inevitable: to your own astonishment, and to the wonder of every beholder, have you not been borne up under the trial? has not your head been raised high above all your fears? darkness been made light before you, and crooked things straight? have you not been mightily upheld amidst all your sufferings, and compassed about with songs of deliverance? And to what can you ascribe your preservation but to the power and faithfulness of that God who has said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; and who has promised to make all things work together for good to them that love him?

Now, as from a part we can judge of the whole; as from the first-fruits we can estimate the quality of the approaching harvest; and from a single glass can form an idea of the contents of the ocean; so, from the specimens of Divine tenderness and faithfulness which in our own experience we have enjoyed, and from the attestations to his fidelity and love transmitted to us from our fathers, we may confidently rely on the immutability of his nature, and the infallible certainty of all the promises contained in his word; and from what we see and know of their exact fulfilment upon earth and in time, we may securely depend on their complete and glorious accomplishment in heaven through eternity.

When, therefore, you look at all the evidences which God has given of the truth of the Gospel, and of his sincerity in the free, rich, and precious invitations of his grace; I must ask you, who are in earnest for eternal life and solicitously inquiring what you must do to be saved, How is it that ye have no faith? In the operations of nature, men see not the hand and agency of the Most High: but they believe themselves perfectly safe in the world which he has made; and trust with the most unbounded confidence to the connexion betwixt cause and effect, and to the steadiness and uniformity of the processes in the material creation. But on what foundation is this universal conviction built? Unless such has originally been the will of God, the husbandman, physician, and astronomer, can assign no reason for the appearances which

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they witness, and the facts upon which their calculations and practices are founded. He has given them no Bible to regulate their judgment in their respective pursuits; nor endowed them with any sense or organ denied to others, by which they can discern his hand and agency, and discover more manifest tokens of his presence and power on the fields of their observation, than he has afforded in the dispensations of his grace. And shall they, in the business of life, without any direct communication from heaven, or any sense or organ withheld from you, believe themselves safe in the world which he sustains, and feel themselves secure in relying on the regularity of the laws which he has prescribed to nature? And after he has lavished on you the contents of the Bible, and poured around your path all the light and radiance of revelation; why do you distrust his word, and persist in harbouring such an amount of suspicion and jealousy in the face of the strongest and most affecting demonstrations of his sincerity and truth?

Even supposing that the rules of husbandry, the principles of medicine, and the laws of astronomy, had all been communicated by inspiration; the students and practitioners of these arts and sciences, could have had no greater security for the propriety and success of their measures, than what you enjoy in matters of religion, and in every subject connected with the present and everlasting welfare of your soul. There is but one God, who is in all, and through all, and over all. He who wields the sceptre over the world of matter, and upholds the mighty mass of creation, is the same who rules in the empire of mind; who pervades it in all its vast extent; who superintends all its complicated operations; and who has given as much stability and firmness to the foundations of Christian hope, as to the ordinances that determine the movements of the planetary system.

How is it then that you can trust him for your bodies and the business of life; and that you distrust him where your souls and their everlasting welfare are concerned? Where was the faith or consistency of the Israelites, who, after having been delivered by the strong hand of God

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from the power of Pharaoh, and conducted through the sea on foot, doubted his ability to feed them in the wilderness? And where is your faith or consistency in confiding in the stability of that world which he has made and which he preserves; and in trusting to the regular succession of day and night, of summer and winter; but distracting yourselves with anxiety and care about the sufficiency of the provisions of his grace, and the safety of your souls; when in obedience to his word you embrace the invitations of the Gospel, and lay hold on the Lord Jesus Christ as the author of your own eternal salvation?

In the one case, God has done nothing to confirm your hope and confidence which, for a moment, can be compared with the security which he has afforded you in the other. He has not given you his word, his promise, nor his oath, to secure you of the success of your manual labour, and of the steadiness and permanence of the laws of nature. And after he has done all this and more, to fortify your dependence upon the declarations of his grace, and to assure all the children of men, that whosoever believeth on his Son shall never perish, but have eternal life; how is it that ye have no faith? Within the confines of immensity, is there a power more high and mighty than the God of heaven? or, amidst all the sacred solemnities employed to give validity and force to the declarations of love and mercy, could the God of truth bind himself by more firm and solid bands than his promise, his oath and the gift of his Son? And yet, after all these have been employed to ratify his proclamations of generosity and tenderness: how is it that you cannot, that you will not believe?

Though creation has no such security nor guard for its stability as his purposes of mercy, and promises of pardon, peace, and reconciliation to the believing penitent; do you regard yourselves as safe in the world which he has made? Do you never fear lest the earth, as it wheels with such rapid velocity in its annual revolution, will break away from the invisible course prescribed it; and, baffling all the exertions of the Almighty to recall it, wander far off into the untrodden tracks of space, beyond the

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cheering visitations of heat and day? And yet while you consider yourselves free from danger in the world which he has made, and which his own providence sustains: how is it that you will not believe yourselves and your eternal interests safe within the limits and protection of that scheme of boundless benignity and mercy, which he planned by his infinite wisdom, and around which he has thrown all the strong and impregnable protection of his omnipotence? Why will you not believe yourselves secure in the hands of Him, who preserves every planet in its place, and has the whole universe at his command; and who has engaged himself by every thing tender and touching in goodness, and sacred and binding in sincerity, to receive every sinner that returns, to give eternal life to all those that obey him, and never to leave nor forsake the souls of those that love him? Has the burden of your temporal interests given any shock to the firmness of the globe you dwell on, or any derangement to the regularity and magnificence of its movements? And after you have seen the ark of mercy advancing so steadily, so majestically on its course; are you terrified, lest by throwing on board the additional weight of your eternal all, you shall burst its overstrained strength, and endanger the safety of the whole that it contains?

I cannot tell you all that the arm of Immanuel has already performed. But I know that he has softened hard and adamantine hearts; that he has changed slaves of Satan into sons of God; that he has driven Jordan back, opened a path for his people through the ocean; that he has plucked the prey from the grasp of death, and stopped the sun in his course, stretched out the heavens like a curtain, and planted immensity with the worlds that occupy and adorn it. Hereafter he will convert Jews and Gentiles, fill the whole earth with his glory, and raise the dead. And is the fulfilment of his promises and the salvation of your soul, a harder task than these manifestations of his might?

Trust then in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away.

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CHAPTER VII.

ON THE WANT OF ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

"Forgive my doubts, O gracious Lord!
And ease the sorrows of my breast;
Speak to my heart the healing word,
That thou art mine—and I am blest."

On the subject of assurance the Christian world has been long widely divided. Some have asserted that it is impossible to attain it, and that it is highly presumptuous either to ask or expect it: whilst others have affirmed that it is not only attainable but absolutely essential to the very nature of faith, and perfectly inseparable from a state of grace.

In matters of faith, we are not at liberty to call any man master. We have the Scriptures in our own hands: and by the authority of Him who gave them, we are commanded to search them, and to try by the law and the testimony every principle and every practice which are recommended to our belief and observance. On examining these conflicting opinions by the unerring standard of revelation, we shall find that neither the one nor the other is strictly correct. We shall find that, though the assurance of salvation is neither essential to the nature of faith nor inseparable from a state of grace, it is a blessing which has been attained, which is still attainable, and which it is the duty of every believer to labour to secure.

We affirm,

I. That the assurance of salvation is neither essential

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to the nature of faith, nor inseparable from a state of grace.

It must be observed that there is a wide difference betwixt the assurance of faith, and the assurance of hope or salvation. The assurance of faith is the belief, the persuasion, or conviction of the truth and certainty of what God has revealed in his word. This is an assurance which is absolutely essential to the nature of faith, and without which we cannot justly be denominated believers at all. If we doubt or discredit what the Scriptures contain, we are unbelievers. If from the proposition, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" we take away the certainty of what it states, or in other words, the assurance of the facts which it affirms: what is the consequence? We must either deny these precious truths entirely, or else be left in a state of awful uncertainty whether God has loved the world, whether he has given his only begotten Son for our salvation, and whether faith possesses any connexion with eternal life. And in the same manner, if we are not firmly convinced of the truth and certainty of every promise and declaration of the Bible, we cannot be said to believe them. We in reality are unbelievers; and expose ourselves to all the dreadful consequences of rejecting the testimony of the God of truth.

We may therefore safely maintain that the assurance of faith, or a clear and full conviction of the reality of the truth believed, is absolutely essential to the nature of fath. In fact, this assurance and faith are one and the same thing. And none who understands the meaning of the language, will ever hesitate for a moment to admit that it is absolutely necessary to the existence of religion in the heart. Faith, and the assurance of faith, are only two names for the same thing.

But the assurance of hope, or of salvation, is quite another matter. This does not consist in the belief of what the Scriptures reveal, but in the knowledge which a Christian possesses of his own interest in the blessings of the Gospel and of his own right to eternal life. It is of this

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assurance that we aver, that it is neither essential to the nature of faith, nor inseparable from a state of grace. To assert the contrary, would be to affirm that the essence of faith consists in the belief of our own salvation; that there is no need of the agency of the Holy Spirit to maintain our peace and joy; that the hope and comfort of believers can never be disturbed nor destroyed by temptation; that all who labour under doubts and fears are in a state of condemnation; and that those who are confident and secure respecting their everlasting happiness are safe. But are these propositions consistent with either the letter or spirit of the inspired records?

1. If the assurance of salvation were essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace; then the essence of faith would consist in a belief of our own salvation.

The Scriptures however represent the essence of faith to consist, not in a belief of our own justification, acceptance with God, nor salvation; but in a belief of the testimony of God, of the record which he has given concerning his Son. They describe faith by coming unto Christ, by fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, receiving Christ, believing on him, and trusting in him. Saving faith may therefore be said to be, not a mere belief of the truth in general, but such a belief as leads the soul to apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, for spiritual life and salvation, and to rely on him for all the purposes for which he is offered to us in the gospel.

Now, though from this act of the soul assurance of salvation may, and ought to result; it is at the same time evident that, however closely related, they are neither radically the same, nor inseparably united. By faith we pass from death unto life; by assurance we know that we have become the subjects of this blessed change. By faith we believe to the saving of the soul: by assurance we know that we have believed through grace. By faith we embrace the Saviour, and obtain an interest in all the blessings of his salvation: by assurance we know that Christ and all his fulness are become our own.

Now though frequently conjoined, it is obvious that in

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themselves are totally distinct, and that in the experience of many they often may be separated. Every living man has a chance for health: but health and life are not inseparable. Every man who is possessed of reason, is capable of learning: but every rational man is far from being a man of literature and science. Some may never have enjoyed an opportunity for cultivating their minds; and others, from the bustle of business or the decay of memory, may have lost much of the learning which they had once acquired. And in the same manner, though faith and assurance are closely allied, they are neither necessarily nor indissolubly connected. Faith may sometimes rise to a calm and settled assurance, and exult with a joy unspeakable and full of glory; and at other times be obliged to contend with weakness and imperfection, with doubts and fears. In some cases the Christian may know in whom he has believed, and in others be able only to say, Who knows but the Lord may be gracious? We may take a medicine fitted to remove our malady, under a full persuasion of its efficacy; and yet not be conscious for a time of a begun recovery. The well-known generosity of a man of philanthropy, who never was heard to have rejected a single application, may encourage us in our difficulties to solicit his aid: but till we actually receive his assistance, we may have many an anxious thought about the success of our petition. And a sinner may apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, completely convinced of his ability and willingness to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him; and yet be long doubtful whether he himself shall be made a partaker of salvation with eternal glory. Some may never arrive at this blessed hope; and others, who have enjoyed it for a season, may afterwards lose it. Many, who at one time imagined that their mountain stood strong, and that they never should be moved, have soon been perplexed and troubled.

In Scripture, accordingly, we find the assurance of salvation represented not as the essence, but as one of the fruits and effects of faith. For unless this is the case, why do we find those who have already believed through

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grace, exhorted to make their calling and election sure? Why are we told, that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God?" Why do we find such kind and animating promises made to those who sow in tears, who seek the face of God in sorrow, and who are bowed down, and broken in heart? And why does St. John declare, "These things have I written unto you, that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life? If assurance of salvation were essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace; then every believer would be endowed with this inestimable blessing, and it would be as superfluous and absurd to exhort the people of God to seek it, as to enjoin the innocent to sue for pardon, or the seeing to pray for eye-sight.

To affirm therefore that assurance of salvation is essential to the nature of faith, confounds the effect with the cause, the fruits and consequences with the nature and essence of faith.

2. To assert that assurance of salvation is essential to the nature of faith, supersedes the necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit to maintain our peace and joy.

The sacred Scriptures, however, intimate, that though real religion tends to inspire peace, hope and joy, still assurance does not flow from a work of grace by any natural necessity, as heat from the fire, or light from the body of the sun. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit; who is not only the source of spiritual life and vigour, but also the author of peace and comfort; and who may give or withhold hope and consolation, in any measure or proportion that he knows to be most for his own glory, and our best and eternal interests. When our ways please the Lord, he makes our enemies be at peace with us. He makes his paths towards us mercy and truth, and fills us with a peace that passeth all understanding, and a joy that is unspeakable, and full of glory. But if we rebel and vex the Holy Spirit, he will turn to be our enemy, and fight against us. He will withdraw the reviving, strengthening, and

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cheering influences of his grace: and, as all the ingenuity of man is utterly unable to produce light to supply the place of the sun, so, when he withholds the elevating and comforting communications of his love, all the contrivances of the Christian are totally inadequate for the removal of the trouble which he feels, and the restoration of the joys which he has forfeited.

This is a case of frequent occurrence. For, though by the provisions of the everlasting covenant, and the power and grace of the Saviour, all the children of God are secured; yet, to manifest their own weakness, and teach them the necessity of habitual and unremitting dependence upon his care and protection, they are often left to bitter and long backslidings. Such, however, is the rooted aversion which he entertains to all sin, that he will not allow it to pass with impunity even in his own people. If they forsake his law and walk not in his judgments; if they break his statutes and keep not his commandments; to awaken them to contrition, to recall them from their wanderings, and compel them to return and seek their rest and happiness in himself, he gives his judgments a commission to pursue them, lays bands on their loins, visits their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes, and makes their own wickedness correct them, and their backslidings reprove them. Under these painful visitations, however, it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish betwixt the corrections of a friend, and the rebukes of an adversary; betwixt the salutary chastisements of a parent, and the vindictive inflictions of a judge. In these circumstances, though still interested in all the riches of redeeming mercy; the believer, like a child under the frown of his father, is terrified lest he shall be cast out from the Divine presence, and given over to blindness of mind and hardness of heart.

3. If the assurance of salvation be essential to the nature of faith, and inseparable from a state of grace, the hope and comfort of believers can never be destroyed nor disturbed by temptation.

There is however no truth so certain, but what some

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Christian or other has been led, under violent and long continued temptation, to call in question. Doubts, at times, have been started in their minds of the existence of God, of the immortality of the soul, and of the reality of the whole Christian system. Now, if believers have been induced to suspect these obvious and indisputable facts, how much more must they have been found to distrust the genuineness of their own religion, and their interest in the promises of the everlasting Gospel? Can it be supposed that they could retain the assurance of their salvation, when tempted to entertain doubts of the fundamental principles of natural and revealed religion, and to deny the existence of salvation altogether? The most holy man, however, that lives, is not beyond the reach of Satan's assaults, nor secured against the most foul and blasphemous suggestions. If the devil, when he said, "if thou be the Son of God," endeavoured to insinuate into the mind of our Lord a doubt concerning his Sonship, how much more must his followers be liable to suspicions and fears respecting their adoption? If the head was thus assailed, how sadly must the members suffer?

4. If the assurance of salvation be essential to the nature of faith, then every one who labours under doubts and fears, must be in a state of condemnation.

From the Bible, however, we are taught to regard all as in a state of grace, and heirs of the great salvation; who, from a discovery of their guilt and danger, have been compelled to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them; who have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as all their salvation and all their desire; and whilst they rely on him for righteousness and strength, are constrained by his love to crucify the flesh with all its affections, and glorify him in their soul, body, and spirit. But many who have given the most ample evidence of their having been born again, and renewed in the spirit of their minds, have been far from always enjoying the comfortable sense of God's love, and of their interest in the great salvation. They have been filled with doubts and fears, with alarm and trouble. They have walked in darkness and had no light. They have gone mourning without

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the sun. Like Heman they have been laid in the lowest deeps, where the wrath of God has gone over them, and where they have trembled lest in his anger he would cut them off. With Asaph they have been led to ask, "Will the Lord cast off for ever, and be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever, doth his promise fail for ever more?"

Now, as it is impossible to be neutral; as every man who is not a believer must be an unbeliever, it follows, either that there are many christians who have no assurance of their own salvation, or that there are many who have all the marks and characters of the people of God; their humility, contrition, their submission to his will, their devotedness to his honour, their love for his presence, and their longing for spiritual enjoyments, while they are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity: a conclusion which is utterly inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the whole sacred volume.

5. If the assurance of salvation be essential to the nature of faith, then all who are secure and confident respecting their everlasting happiness must be safe.

Nothing, however, appears to be more remote from the truth: and I have no hesitation in affirming, not only that a man may be in a state of grace whilst destitute of the assurance of salvation, but that some christians, who are filled with alarm respecting their final condition, are in a far more hopeful state, than many who live at their ease, and entertain no apprehension about their everlasting felicity.

Salvation is an object of infinite importance. It augurs well of a man to hear of his doubts and fears about his eternal welfare. This shows that he has some concern about the subject, and encourages the hope that he is laying it seriously to heart. It is a most alarming circumstance to find any man, in an affair of such magnitude, too calm and confident. It naturally excites a suspicion that he has neither part nor lot in the matter: for if he were aware of its immense value, he would from time to time discover a solicitude to examine the foundation of his hope and ascertain the safety of his state. If you

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see two travellers, the one, without ever looking after his luggage, making a great noise about the treasure which it contains; and the other, without saying much about the matter, frequently examining if his baggage be secure; you would be at no loss to pronounce which of them acted the most rational part, and was likely to be possessed of the greatest wealth. And the man who says least about his hopes, but gives the greatest diligence to make his calling and election sure, is generally more alive to religion, and far nearer the kingdom of heaven, than the professor, who flatters himself on the safety of his state, but is careless about the means of advancing his growth in grace, and promoting his progress in holiness and spirituality.

Anxiety and alarm are distressing and painful: but they are at the same time salutary. If the man is already savingly converted, they will soon pass away, and the end will be peace: and if he is not yet reconciled to God, if they are of a sound and genuine nature, they will never leave him till he is established in the faith. But amongst all the melancholy objects which we meet, none is so affecting and overpowering as the sight of men, whose temper and conduct prove that they are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; and yet are perfectly secure and easy; and, in spite of every remonstrance, persevere in the lulling and deceitful cry of Peace, peace, till their feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and the shadows of death close for ever around them. If the Christian be possessed of the assurance of faith; hypocrites and formalists have the confidence of presumption; and the blind boldness of the latter is often far more impregnable, than the peace and hope of the former. Whilst the strong man armed keepeth his house, there is frequently as great quietness within, as when it is brought under the power of a stronger than he. The dearest of God's saints have at times been in perplexity and despondence; when the foolish virgins were secure; and those who were farthest from acceptance with God, shew by their address to our Redeemer, in the day of judgment, that they entertained the firmest persuasion of their safety. "Lord, Lord, have

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we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

If therefore the essence of faith consists, not in our confidence of our safety; but in the reliance of the soul upon Christ, for salvation; if assurance of our interest in the love of God is the gift of the Holy Ghost, and forfeited by our secure and careless walk; if during bitter and violent temptation, without losing our relation to the Saviour, we may not only be deprived of the hope of heaven, but even of the exercise of faith itself; if many of the people of God have been compelled to walk in darkness without light, while they continued dear to his heart; and above all, if some Christians, who are filled with alarms and fears respecting their everlasting interest, are in a far more hopeful condition, than many professors, who live at their ease and have the most absolute confidence in their final felicity: then we are warranted to conclude that the assurance of salvation is neither essential to the nature of faith, nor inseparable from a state of grace; and that a man may be a child of God and an heir of heaven, though at times uncertain of his situation, and apprehensive of the issue of his hopes and expectations.

Having thus endeavoured to provide for the comfort and establishment of those whose souls are broken and bowed down from an apprehension that they are in a graceless condition, because they are destitute of the assurance of salvation, in faithfulness to a far more numerous class, and who are in a far more dangerous situation, I must now show,

II. That the assurance of salvation is a blessing which has been attained, and which is still attainable.

That this is the case we may infer,

1. From the love which the Lord Jesus Christ bears to his people.

He has loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness he has drawn them. From love to us he left the throne of heaven, assumed our na-

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ture, suffered, bled, and died. From love to us he rose from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high, watches over all our interests, guides us by his counsel, protects us by his power, and keeps us as the apple of his eye. Now, can we suppose that he has so long taken such a deep and tender interest in our welfare; and that during the whole of our pilgrimage, he will conceal from us every discovery of his peculiar and endearing love? Would he die for our redemption, and with the feelings of a brother, intercede for us in the presence of his father; and after all, leave us, till our dying day, in a state of painful uncertainty whether we shall be saved or lost? We cannot for a moment entertain such a harsh and dishonourable thought. For the correction of our faults, or the trial of our faith and patience, he may for a season withdraw the light of his countenance, and involve us in perplexity and trouble. But the strong affection which he bears us, the numerous and costly proofs which he has given of his strong and everlasting regard, are all a security and pledge that sooner or later we shall be honoured with the manifestation of his favour, and blessed with a foretaste of our future and eternal joy.

That believers may arrive at a knowledge of their salvation may be inferred,

2. From the change which they undergo at regeneration.

When we are admitted into the family of God, we not only receive a new name, but are likewise made partakers of a new nature. We are not only invested with a title to the kingdom of heaven, but also with a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Old habits are broken off, and new ones formed. We are made to dislike the things which we formerly loved, and pursue the things which we previously shunned and hated. We are made to experience a radical and total transformation: for "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. And so absolutely essential is this renovation of nature, and this conformity to the image of the Saviour, to the existence of religion in the heart, that, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

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Now, shall a man undergo such a great and astonishing change; and after all be unable to ascertain its existence? Shall we be renewed in the spirit of our minds, created again in Christ Jesus unto good works, and rendered not merely reformed or altered men, but new creatures; and after all, are we to imagine that it is impossible in any case to arrive at a knowledge of the fact, and that we must through the whole of life remain ignorant of this blessed and gracious transformation?

If any great alteration takes place in our outward circumstances; if from a state of poverty we are raised to affluence; if from pining sickness we are restored to health; if by patient application to study, from being ignorant and illiterate, we acquire literature and science; we soon become sensible of the agreeable improvement. The delightful transition is not published to the world, and concealed from ourselves: we are the first to know it. And shall we imagine that a man may be the subject of the greatest of all changes; that from being a sinner he shall become a saint; that from being careless about his soul, and the adorable Redeemer, he shall be in earnest for eternal life, and regard Jesus as all his salvation and all his desire; and yet never be able to discover the interesting and momentous fact?

The change may be accomplished suddenly or slowly; it may be produced openly and visibly; or take place in a manner secret and unobserved: for there are diversities of operations: and in forming the soul anew, the Holy Spirit is not confined to any particular mode, nor restrained by any fixed and immutable law. He acts according to the good pleasure of his will. But still, in whatever way the change takes place, at whatever age, or by what ever means it is accomplished, the consequences are great and lasting; so that from the effect we are at no loss to ascertian the nature and reality of the cause. The descent of the dew may escape observation: but when we see it lying on the grass all around, we are certain that it must have fallen. A child can give no account of the commencement of his existence, nor of the time and manner in which his soul joined his body: but no sooner does

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he arrive at the exercise of reason, than he is convinced that his being must have had a beginning, and that at some time or other his soul must have been united to his body. And the Christian too may be unable to tell exactly by what means he was brought to the knowledge of the truth, or to describe distinctly how the blessed change began, and was carried on. He may have learned much from one sermon, and more from another. He may have profited much by one exercise or ordinance, and more by another. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how: for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." But though unable to describe the process, by which he was brought from nature to grace: yet when he is established in the faith, he must find a great and total difference betwixt what he was once and what he is now; so that, like the man whom our Lord had cured of his blindness, who declared, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see;" when the believer takes a calm and enlightened survey of his present state in contrast with his past condition, he also will be able to say, "One thing I know, that, whereas by nature I neither knew God nor loved him, the desire of my heart is now to him and to the remembrance of his name; whereas I walked according to the course of this world, and lived in the vanity of my mind; now my heart's desire and prayer are, that Christ may be magnified in me, whether that shall be by life or by death: for whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee." And if such is the result which a Christian's examination of his own experience is calculated to afford; is it not obvious that the assurance of salvation may at times be attained, and that the Spirit himself will bear witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God?

3. Assurance is a blessing which has been attained.

In the Psalms we frequently find David speaking of his gracious relation to God: calling himself his servant, and

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the Lord the portion of his inheritance. With all the confidence and calmness of one who had the witness in himself that he was born from above, and that he was an heir of the righteousness of faith, he declares on his death-bed, that God had made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. Job possessed the same exalted and delightful attainment, when he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." And did not Paul too enjoy the same sublime and animating confidence, when he said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day?" Was it not in consequence of this assurance that he declared, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me?" Was it not under the influence of the same strong and glorious hope, that on the survey of his long career, and the near prospect of its violent and bloody termination, with holy boldness and sacred triumph he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day?"

From such language, it is evident that these holy men had no doubt of their own interest in the covenant of grace. And is it credible that this precious blessing was imparted to them, and that it will be withheld from others, who walk in their steps and are partakers of their faith? Is there partiality or respect of persons with God? Shall one man be saved by grace through faith; and shall another man, who cleaves to grace through faith, be lost? and shall one man by the exercise of faith on the Son of God, arrive at the assurance of his own eternal safety; and shall another man, who seeks the same blessing in the same manner, be prevented from ever reaching it?

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That this blessing was intended for the benefit of all believers who seek it, in the manner which God has prescribed in his word, is manifest,

4. From the exhortations which in Scripture are given to seek it.

In one place we are exhorted to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure;" and in another to "give the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." But if it be impossible to secure a knowledge of our own salvation, for what purpose were these injunctions left on record? Were they written merely to tantalize us with empty and fallacious hopes, and excite our industry in a direction absolutely unavailing? Men destitute of sensibility, and completely hardened in crime, may sport with the feelings of their fellow-creatures, and amuse them with hopes which they never intend to realize: but the Father of mercies and the God of love never enjoins any duty that is impracticable, nor inspires any expectations which he has no intention to fulfil?

On the same principle therefore on which I believe that truth, honesty, and sobriety, are all practicable duties, because they are inculcated in the Bible; from the exhortations to make our calling and election sure, and to give diligence to the full assurance of hope, I am also obliged to believe that the assurance of salvation is an attainable blessing. These injunctions to seek it are a pledge of the love and veracity of the Lord, that, if we employ the diligence which he has prescribed, and in the manner which he has directed, we shall not labour in vain, nor spend our strength for nought, but shall most certainly "know, if we follow on to know the Lord."

This conclusion is confirmed,

5. By the promises of God.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant. He that believeth hath the witness in himself." Believers are represented as possessing the first-fruits of the Spirit; as knowing their calling and election of God; as rejoicing in hope of his glory; as now the sons of God, but that it doth not yet appear what they shall be; as knowing that they are of

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God, and as having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And our blessed Lord himself declares, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

From all these circumstances taken together; from the love of Christ to his people; from the nature of regeneration; from the example of the saints; from the exhortations and promises of Scripture, we are warranted to maintain that the assurance of hope is an attainable blessing.

I must go farther, and add, that,

III. It is the duty of every Christian to labour to secure it.

The duty of seeking this blessing will appear by considering either the command of God, or the multiplied advantages with which the assurance of salvation is attended.

1. The command of God on the subject is clear and explicit. And when nothing more than his authority is requisite to render any practice or pursuit our binding and indispensable duty; after he has so distinctly and forcibly enjoined us to make our calling and election sure, and to give diligence to the full assurance of hope, it must be at our peril, if we despise or neglect a precept so express and solemn.

2. The advantages with which the assurance of salvation is attended, are numerous and invaluable.

It dignifies and ennobles the soul. For what can raise the mind to a higher elevation; give it a more decisive superiority over all that is low, grovelling and base; or fill it with a more exalted and delightful consciousness of its own real dignity, its renovated grandeur, and the boundless extent of the glory and felicity to which it shall ultimately rise; than to know that we are the children of God, the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the heirs of his eternal kingdom? Can any honour or distinction be

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more joyous and transporting, than to have a sense of our reconciliation to God, and of our interest in redeeming love, demonstrated to our understanding, and impressed upon our hearts; and to be able, amidst all the duties and labours, the trials and distresses of life, to say, "This God is my God for ever and ever, and Jesus is my beloved and my friend?"

It sanctifies and purifies the heart, and renders its possessor active in the cause of God and goodness. Having the love of God shed abroad in his soul by the Holy Ghost, and possessed of the spirit of adoption, the believer feels an alliance to Deity, breathes the air of paradise, has a fellowship with the happy spirits before the throne, and transfuses into his temper and conduct, something of the unsullied purity and seraphic ardour, which adorn the characters, and dignify the services of the inhabitants of heaven. Where was there a man that ever rose higher in faith, or love, or holiness; a man whose soul was more completely free from the dross and dregs of mortality; a man who followed the Lord more fully, and was more zealously devoted to his honour; a man who had acquired more of an angel's mind, and possessed more of the spirit of his adorable Master, than Paul? But the great spring of all his activity, the rich source of all his consolations, the grand impelling principle which carried him forward with such matchless energy in his divine career, was a knowledge of his union to the Lord Jesus Christ, and of his interest in the great salvation. "The love of Christ," says he, "constraineth me. I know whom I have believed. The life that I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And did we possess the same blessed assurance in the same high and solid degree, it would still produce the same glorious and transforming effects.

It supports and cheers the mind under the various trials and distresses of life. Without this assurance, the mind, in a time of trouble and danger, is in a state of perpetual agitation and distraction; like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. But this assurance proves an anchor to the soul, which keeps it sure and

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steadfast; gives stability to the sublime and bliss-creating expectations of the mind; and preserves it, amidst all the attacks and all the foes that can assail it, in perfect serenity and unbroken peace. Our condition may be low, and our lot calamitous; our wordly affairs may be in disorder, and our friends may prove false and treacherous; the dear companions of our youth may be sleeping in the dust and our once happy habitations may be laid in darkness and desolation by the ravages of death; but none of these things can move us, when we know that we have God for our portion, Jesus for our Saviour, and heaven for our inheritance and home. By disclosing the extent of our security, and giving a present subsistence to the objects of our hopes, it disarms adversity of its gloom, death of its sting, and the grave of its horrors. It has carried thousands comfortably, joyfully, through the greatest fight of afflictions, and brought them off with more than victory. It will enable us to take a calm and steady survey of all the terrific forms in which tribulation can possibly assault us, and then to say, in the intrepid tone and holy triumph of the Apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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CHAPTER VIII.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM THE REMAINS OF CORRUPTION.

"Cleanse me, O Lord, and cheer my soul
With thy forgiving love;
Oh make my broken spirit whole,
And bid my fears begone."

THERE is nothing on which the hearts of Christians are more strongly and intensely set than holiness. Their great ambition is to be conformed to the will of God. They are delighted with every additional spiritual attainment which they gain; and rejoice in the prospect of heaven, because there they shall be like Christ, for they shall see him as he is.

But sin is the abominable thing which they hate: and in proportion to the degree in which they love holiness, are the pain and self-abasement which they feel when prevented from reaching the sacred elevations which they admire, and the shame and consternation which they experience when betrayed into the offences which they abhor. Could we follow them into their closets we should find them prostrate before the Lord, complaining in all the bitterness of the most oppressive vexation that they cannot do the things that they would, that they are beset with temptations, and overtaken with iniquity.

When, time after time, the corruption, which they hoped was subdued or entirely eradicated, breaks out, and surprises them by its power and prevalence; they suspect that their religion is delusive, and that they are still in all the guilt, degradation, and wretchedness of a natural con-

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dition. If their religion were real, they believe that they would be growing in grace, going from strength to strength, shining in the beauties of holiness, and abounding in the fruits of righteousness. Their frequent falls and gross imperfections lead them to fear that they are far from God and far from hope.

On the subject of indwelling-sin two opinions have been advanced, alike opposite to the dictates of inspiration, and hostile to the interests of practical godliness. Whilst some, greatly to the grief of the children of God, have maintained that believers in the present life rise superior to the remains of corruption; others with equal positiveness, to the lamentable encouragement of carelessness and security, contend that religion consists in an assent to the truths of Christianity; and that, whatever may be a man's spirit and practice, as long as he retains this assent he is in a state of safety.

In order to disentangle this subject from embarrassment and perplexity, and at once to prevent the licentious perversion of the doctrine of indwelling-sin, and provide for the establishment and comfort of the believer who suspects that he is in a state of condemnation because he is molested with the remains of corruption; it will be necessary to show:

I. That religion produces a great change upon the character.

II. That it does not in this life make the Christian perfect: but

III. That amidst all his falls and infirmities, he is essentially different from the irreligious and carnal.

I. Religion produces a great and thorough change upon the character of those who embrace it.

It does not bestow merely the remission of sins, but likewise a renewal of nature. Were we to assert that it imparted no more than the forgiveness of iniquity, the consequences would be most horrid and ruinous. If by a mere assent to the doctrines of the Gospel men obtained the pardon of all their trespasses, without being laid

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under any obligation to love and serve God, or brought to devote themselves to a life of piety and holiness; this would open the flood-gates of vice, and make Christ the minister of sin. And what a perversion is this of the blessed Gospel! and what an insufferable insult to our adorable Redeemer and Lord! Did he come into the world, endure the outrage of ungodly men, submit to the agonies of Gethsemane and the tortures of the cross, to save us in our sins? to form by his mediation a highway, along which, in hourly succession, the vices and crimes, bad passions and bad tempers of earth, might be conveyed into heaven, and the kingdom of God filled with all the filth and impurity that darken and disgrace our globe? He came to save us from our sins; to destroy the works of the devil; to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. He came, not to crowd heaven with the trash, scum, and offscourings of this world; but with a people who are redeemed from all iniquity, who are conformed to his own image, and who have washed their robes, and made them white in his blood.

If the forgiveness of sins and a right to eternal life be all that is necessary for our salvation, what is the use of the Holy Ghost? Why has he been sent down to renew us in the spirit of our minds, to create us again in Christ Jesus unto good works, to create in us clean hearts, and renew right spirits within us? If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. The renovation of our nature is as indispensable to salvation, as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are just as distinctly told, that except a man be born again, he shall not see the kingdom of God, as that he that believeth not shall be damned. He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners. And the Scriptures assure us, that if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his.

The society and services of heaven are pure and holy. What enjoyment could a carnal mind derive from its inexhaustible sources of ecstacy and bliss? or what fitness could it possess for the sublime and ennobling employ-

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ments of that blissful world? To the unregenerate soul, all these ineffable delights are insipid, or rather disgusting and odious. The Sabbath is a weariness. Prayer and religious exercises are offensive or intolerable. And what satisfaction could men in such a state receive from all the elevating services, and overwhelming splendour of celestial glory? The dissipated have no pleasure in the comfort of sobriety, nor the illiterate in the disclosures of learning and science. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

Did those who, in former ages, believed on Jesus, neglect good works? Did those who have already entered into the regions of everlasting rest, gain admission there without a clean heart and a right spirit? or do any of the faithful now on earth, treat the obligations of piety with indifference, or shew a contempt for the claims of enlightened beneficence, and practical godliness? The faithful in former ages laboured to adorn the Gospel by the benignity of their tempers, and the holiness of their lives: and those in the present day who are reconciled unto God by the Gospel of his Son, are careful to purify themselves even as he is pure. They have their conversation in heaven and their fruit unto holiness. They live by faith and walk with God. Having the hope that when Christ shall appear, they shall be like him, they purify themselves even as he is pure.

But whilst religion makes a great and thorough change upon the heart and conduct of those who embrace it; for the relief of those who suspect that they are in a graceless condition, because they are harassed with the remains of corruption, it must be observed, that,

II. The sanctification, or holiness of believers, is never complete in the present life.

The Bible uniformly represents religion as a progressive principle; which can be strengthened and improved by care and culture, but which never in this world reaches full maturity and perfection. The righteous holdeth on his way, and he that hath clean hands waxeth stronger

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and stronger. Through every step of his pilgrimage, and to the very last hour of his life, the believer is followed by the obligation to go from strength to strength, to forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before. The most holy and heavenly-minded man on this side of the world of glory, finds that he has not fulfilled all the duties which he owes to God; nor secured all the spiritual attainments to which he has access: and that however great his services, or multiplied his enjoyments, he is bound to be still growing in grace, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

So far from discharging every trust and crowding every spiritual acquisition into their possession, the best and holiest of men discover that in many things they offend, and in all that they sin and come short of the glory of God. It was not Saul, Absalom, Ahithophel, nor any of the profligate and abandoned in the court or the country of Judea; but David, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet singer of Israel, the man after God's own heart, who exclaimed, "Iniquities prevail against me: who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." And it was not Demas the apostate, nor Judas the traitor; but Paul, the steadfast adherent of the faith, the zealous and indefatigable apostle of the cross, who cried out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" After his unrivalled labours and appalling sufferings in the service of his Master, and the multiplied and invaluable proofs which he had received of his presence and favour; we hear him declaring that he had not attained, neither was already perfect. Throughout the whole of life he found a law, that, when he would do good, evil was present with him: and while he delighted in the law of God after the inward man, he saw another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members.

So far from arriving at perfection in this life, I have no hesitation in affirming that believers are frequently prevented from doing the good which they love and admire, and betrayed into the evils which they dread and abhor.

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1. They are frequently prevented from doing the good which they love and admire.

It is indeed no difficult matter to perform the external duties of religion. While they have eyes, it is easy to read the Scriptures. While they have ears, they experience no hardship in listening to the preaching of the Gospel. While they have money, they are at no loss to give alms. And while they retain the use of their reason, they encounter no obstacle in framing their words into the shape of a petition, and uttering them in the style of prayer. But all these are the mere form and shadow of Christianity. The life and essence of religion consist in the exercise of the heart: and when this animating principle is wanting, the most splendid and costly round of outward observances is as dead and useless, as the body when the soul has fled. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

And knowing that God is a spirit, and delighting in him after the inward man; if he could get his wish every believer would serve him with his spirit. He would never pray, but as with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: he would never look at the cross, but with a bleeding and broken heart: he would never utter a sentence of thanksgiving, without lifting up his soul with his song of praise: he would never approach a religious ordinance, without going to God, to God his exceeding joy. If he could, he would stand complete in all the will of God. He would eradicate every remnant of evil from his nature: extirpate vice from the globe: fill the whole earth with the glory of the Lord: be perpetually employed in works of faith and labours of love; and never embark in a duty nor engage in any undertaking, without throwing his whole heart and soul into the service, and rivalling the spirituality and fervour of the just made perfect, and the enraptured hosts who encircle the throne of the Eternal.

But can he do the things that he would? Can he give to the great and adorable Jehovah all the glory due unto his name, and all the homage and obedience that he longs to render? Is there at this moment breathing within the confines of the planet which we occupy, or is there to be

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found within the records of time, a single believer who has obtained all the holiness that he could covet? who has done all the good that he could desire? and who, till he enter the regions of light, could solicit no accession to his religious virtues and spiritual enjoyments? So far from having acquired all the holiness and spirituality which he could wish; where is a single day, or a single action in the whole life of the most heavenly-minded saint, in which he is satisfied with his performances? in which he can say that he has faithfully done his duty, and fully discharged every obligation which he owes to his Saviour and his God? in which he can declare that the law can demand no more than what he has actually yielded it, and that the eye of Omniscience can detect no flaw either in the work which he has done, or in the spirit and temper with which he has fulfilled it?

The language of the saint, after the performance of even the best and noblest service that ever was accomplished by human agency, is, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no flesh be justified. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." After he has done his utmost, he finds that he has done less than he should: that he has done it very imperfectly, and that he must have recourse to God for the forgiveness of the sinfulness with which it has been attended.

But this is not the worst of the matter. Indwelling-sin not only prevents believers from doing the good which they love, but,

2. Frequently betrays them into the evil which they fear and hate.

Passion, pride, and peevishness, beset us. Impatience, fretfulness, and discontentment, spring up and trouble us. Irritation, anger, and censoriousness, often surprise and overpower us. If the brightest day has had its clouds, and the finest weather its haze and its showers; the best and holiest characters have had their faults and imperfections.

Weaknesses and inconsistencies have appeared, not only in the lives of ordinary professors, men of an inferior

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rank in religion; but also in the conduct of men, who by their faith and piety had risen to the highest elevation in the Divine life, and who might have been expected to have most completely escaped the pollutions that are in the world. These eminent saints have been seduced into sin, not at the commencement of their course, when they had little knowledge of the deceitfulness and power of their remaining corruptions; but after they had long walked on the road to Zion, tasted largely of the Divine condescension and kindness, and experienced much of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Just when they had been distinguished by the most signal mercies; when it might have been hoped that their hearts would have been overflowing with the warmest love and gratitude to the adorable Giver of all good, and most firmly and affectionately rivetted to his honour and interest; then was the time that they were guilty of their most foul and lamentable falls.

And if these men were overcome in such circumstances by the sin that dwelt in them, who can expect to escape all the arts of this watchful and wily adversary? Who can ever hope to possess a stronger principle of grace, to be honoured with more elevating intercourse with the most High, to be blessed with more precious communications of his favour, and more richly furnished with all that is requisite for his perseverance and stability, than Noah and Abraham, Moses and David, Hezekiah and Peter? Are we more sincere and upright than Noah, who had this testimony, that he was perfect in his generations and walked with God? Are we stronger in the faith than the father of the faithful? Have we a greater command of our feelings and temper, than the meekest man upon earth? Are we more humble, self-denied, and spiritually-minded than David? Are we more solicitous to comply with the whole will of God, and to maintain the Divine life in our soul, than Hezekiah, who could appeal to Omniscience that he had walked before him in truth and with a perfect heart? Or are we possessed of a greater degree of zeal for his honour and resolution in his service than Peter, who believed that he was able to go to

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prison and death for his sake, and who at last laid down his life in his cause? When therefore we see such men as these, who had been long conversant with all the occurrences of the spiritual warfare, who well knew the depths of Satan, who for years had withstood the power and policy of inherent corruption, and who were so fully prepared to encounter and repel its assaults; when we see such men as these foiled and defeated, the stoutest heart may justly tremble, and the most exalted and courageous in all the ranks of the faithful take heed lest he also fall.

But notwithstanding all the falls and imperfections of the Christian, we must maintain,

III. That there is a wide and essential difference betwixt him and the irreligious and carnal.

After God has loved his people with an everlasting love, and sent his own Son to redeem them; is it credible that no moral difference shall be created betwixt the objects of his affection and the objects of his displeasure; and that nothing more is necessary to make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, than to fit us for occupying a place in the regions of darkness and despair? After the Holy Ghost has been commissioned to renovate our natures, and form us after the image of our Lord Jesus Christ; are we to suppose that he finds our hearts too hard and refractory to yield to his soul-subduing and purifying power; and that in spite of all his efforts to mould us anew, and bring us to the love and practice of holiness, he is obliged to leave us under the same rankling and debasing virulence of depravity and vice as the hardened and abandoned? Though we are told that the kingdom of God is within us, and that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; are we notwithstanding to imagine that a man may be a Christian, that he may be joined to the Lord Jesus, and have Christ formed in him the hope of glory; and yet after all that there shall be no difference betwixt his temper and conduct, and those of a man who is without God and without hope?

A real Christian accordingly gives, in various ways, the

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most ample and satisfactory evidence that he is living under the power of religion.

1. The sins, into which he is betrayed, in general, are inward and spiritual.

Gross and open wickedness is absolutely inconsistent with a state of grace, and proves that the man who commits it is dead in trespasses and sins. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But believers are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. However dreadful and horrid, outward transgression gives them comparatively little or no uneasiness. Having their hearts exercised unto godliness, and their hands filled with the work of the Lord, they are seldom molested with the apprehension that they shall dishonour his adorable name by any flagrant and visible violation of his law.

Amidst the many causes of their secret humiliation and tears, it is rarely indeed that any of the offences which the world calls sin, constitute a ground of their self-abasement and sorrow. They may labour under a want of love, spirituality, and fervour: but no man can charge them with a defect in justice, integrity, and charity. They may be haunted with wild, worldly, and wandering thoughts: but no dark nor ungodly deeds disgrace them. They cannot reach that elevation of mind which they admire, nor give to God all that lively and affectionate service which they delight to render: but their hearts cannot reproach them with any act of intemperance or profanity, of fraud or villany. Their rejoicing is this, the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world.

But whilst they are diligent in the improvement of every religious privilege, and in the discharge of every moral duty; whilst they are shining in the beauties of holiness, and abounding in the fruits of righteousness; they are ashamed and grieved because they cannot throw their whole heart and soul into their services; nor enliven and enrich their performances with all that warmth, elevation, spirituality, and unction, which compose the very essence of devotion, and are so precious in the sight of God.

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They cannot rest on him so simply, realize his presence so fully, cleave to him so closely, delight in him so ardently, enjoy him so largely, pour out their hearts to him so freely, nor glorify him so effectually, as he requires, and the attainment of which would constitute their joy and rejoicing. Their love frequently languishes, their faith wavers, their minds wander, their zeal and vigilance abate; insensibility and formality creep over their affections, eat out the very strength and substance of their duties, and fill their spirits with distress and perplexity.

It is for these things that their souls are sore and broken and bowed down within them, and that they go mourning all the day. Whilst others are admiring their graces and extolling their performances, they are prostrate before God, lamenting the deadness and treachery of their hearts, and abashed and confounded upon account of the awful defects and the horrid pollutions which have degraded and defiled their services.

But provided that they can secure a respectable reputation, and avoid the present inconveniences of vice, what care hypocrites and formalists about the adorning of the inner man; about purity, liveliness, and spirituality of heart? When did you ever hear them complaining of blindness of mind and insensibility of soul? When did you ever find them bewailing the dulness, coldness, and treachery of their spirits? mourning and deploring that iniquities prevail against them? and entreating God to cleanse them from secret faults, and to make them all holy and glorious within?

If ever they are betrayed into open sin, it must be observed, that,

2. The outward transgressions of believers are committed ignorantly and voluntarily.

We cannot deny that they sometimes offend; for there is no man who liveth and sinneth not.

But did you ever hear of a Christian laying plans of mischief? plotting evil upon his bed? travailing with deceit? and coolly and deliberately contriving by what means he might execute the base and malicious purposes which he had projected?

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The works of the unregenerate are bad. Their worthless deeds, however, are only an imperfect expression of the wickedness that is seated in their souls. However vile, revolting, and abominable their actions; if we could look within, we should find that their inward parts are unspeakably worse. Their lives are under some restraint; but their hearts are free from control; and pride, passion, profligacy, and impiety, rage and riot there with unbridled fury. Instead of being overtaken by iniquity, overcome by temptation, and surprised into sin; they follow after vice, meditate mischief, court temptation, and long for opportunities of gratifying the desires of the flesh and of the mind. For unless this is the case, why do they absent themselves from the ordinances of religion, and habitually and studiously shun the means of spiritual improvement? associate with the worldly, the carnal, and ungodly, and linger with such eager delight on the verge of dissipation and debauchery? Unless they wish to catch the infection, why do they place themselves within the reach of contagion? And unless they love what is forbidden, and desire to be entangled in the snares of vice, why do they frequent the society of sinners, and hang so fondly about the unhallowed purlieus of profligacy and crime?

But if a believer fall by his iniquity, it is in consequence of some sudden and unexpected assault. Vice attacks him by surprise, or assumes some fair and plausible appearance; and thus, when his vigilance is relaxed, and his suspicions lulled to rest, before he is aware of the direction in which he is hurried, he is made the victim of temptation and overpowered by sin.

But by whatever means he is betrayed into evil, sin is the abominable thing that he hates; and he is no sooner made sensible of the wrong that he has done than he renounces it, and repents and abhors himself in dust and ashes. The supreme object of his ambition being to walk so as to please God, his confession of sin is frank, open, and unreserved. The acknowledgment of his transgressions gives him no uneasiness: but the presence and power of evil fill him with shame and self-abasement. Whenever therefore he discovers the obliquity into which he has

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been seduced, he instantly lays his case before the Lord: crying, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." God may forgive him: but he himself is inexorable, and never can forget nor forgive his own baseness and vileness.

But when did you ever find an irreligious man specifying his offences? deploring his infirmities; and in all the ingenuousness of contrition, and in all the bitterness of a broken heart, bewailing his guilt and unworthiness? You may perhaps hear him in general terms admitting that he is a sinner; that every man has his failing, and that he does not pretend to be better than his neighbours. But these vague and wholesale confessions, which implicate the whole human race, mean nothing; and no more affect his heart nor penetrate his conscience, than if he were to declare that he is a man and not an angel, an inhabitant of earth and not an occupant of heaven. If you attempt to make him sensible of the guilt of any of his most plain and unquestionable violations of the Divine law: you may reason and remonstrate as you please; he will stoutly and stiffly deny the charge; or if denial be impossible, he will labour to palliate or justify his delinquency, and dwell with glowing satisfaction and the most disgusting pride, upon the many excellencies of his heart and virtues of his life.

Conduct such as this decides the character. By concealing her father's images, and defeating his attempts to recover them, Rachel showed her love of idolatry: while the Ephesians, by bringing forward their magical books, and cheerfully committing them to the flames, proved how completely they had renounced all regard for divination. And when we see the subterfuges and evasions of the worldly and self-righteous; when we see how pertinaciously they stand upon their defence, and how uniformly they treat those as their enemies who have the courage and kindness to tell them the truth: can any thing furnish a more infallible and refreshing evidence of your being possessed of another and a better spirit, than your ambition to give God the glory due unto his name, by freely and unreservedly proclaiming your own sinfulness

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and depravity in breaking the requisitions of his righteous law, and withholding the love and the obedience which you owed him?

3. The transgressions of believers are only occasional and temporary.

Their constant employment is to do good. They exercise themselves to have a good conscience in the sight of God and of man. And they habitually and assiduously labour to fulfil the great and blessed object of their high and holy vocation. They do good unto all as they have opportunity; hold forth the word of life; shine in the beauties of holiness, and abound in the fruits of righteousness. The very apostle who makes such a humble and affecting confession of his being unable to do the things that he would, and made to do the things that he hated; was one of the best and holiest of men that the earth ever carried, or that ever entered the regions of glory. He is the very man who declares that he served God with his spirit in the gospel of his Son; that when it pleased God to reveal his Son in him, that he might preach him among the Gentiles, immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood. He is the very man who declared that for him to live was Christ, and to die was gain; who was in labours more abundant than his brethren; and though, in his own esteem not worthy of the name, was in reality the very chief of the apostles. He is the man who, through life, counted every thing but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ; and at the close of his long career, and in the full prospect of appearing within a few hours before the God of knowledge and of holiness, could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

And this is the study, and in a greater or less degree the attainment of every man who has been taught the truth as it is in Jesus. He lives not to himself, but to him who loved him, and gave himself for him. He has his heart in heaven and his conversation there. Who are the men who hold forth most steadily the word of life, and shine most brilliantly in the beauties of holiness? Who are foremost in every good work, and most active

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and indefatigable in every humane and benevolent enterprise? Who are the men who hallow our sabbaths, crowd our churches, educate our youth, and pour in the funds requisite to feed the institutions from which the various streams of piety and beneficence flow to purify and bless our polluted and wretched globe? Who are these, but the men who lament that they cannot do the things that they would, and complain that iniquities prevail against them?

Their outward offences are slight, rare, and transient. They no sooner discover that they have fallen by their iniquity, than they instantly mourn over the evil that they have done, and in all the fervour of importunity, and in all the lowliness of humility, implore forgiveness from that God whom they have offended, and grace in all time to come to walk in his commandment. Can you assert that such men are the servants of sin? Can you say that cold is the natural temperature of summer, because in that season we have a few chilly blasts? that light is not the usual effect of sunshine, because the day is sometimes darkened and deformed with clouds and storms? or can you affirm that holiness is not the believer's chosen, favourite element, because he is sometimes inadvertently or unconsciously surprised into sin?

But look at the ranks of the unregenerate, the worldly, and the carnal: and what do you discover? Do you see men who are rivalling the faithful in their zeal? who are contending side by side against the apathy and insensibility of the ignorant and secure, and the general prevalence of selfishness and sin? men who are labouring to extend the triumphs of virtue, and eclipse the followers of the Saviour in every branch of practical goodness? You will behold among them the covetous and the unclean, drunkards and swearers, sabbath-breakers and men covered with every vice. You will find among them men who burlesque every thing that is sacred, and oppose every thing that is serious. But in vain will you search for one who loves God with his whole heart, who takes Christ for his pattern, and strives to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of God.

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4. They resist all sin, and shun every appearance of evil.

Sin is contrary to the will of that God, whom the Christian cordially and supremely loves: it is inconsistent with the honour of that Saviour, to whom he owes his all, and prefers to his chief joy: and it is ruinous to that soul, which is formed for immortality, and which has an endless range of happiness or misery before it. How then can he love it? court it? obey it? How can he do this great wickedness, and sin against God? How can he do this abominable evil, dishonour his adored Redeemer, and crucify him afresh? How can he, for the paltry and perishing pleasures of earth and of time, throw a blessed eternity away, and encounter all the indignation of an insulted and offended God?

He is, therefore, perpetually on the watch to detect this accursed thing which his soul hates: and when he finds it out, his eye cannot pity it, neither can his heart spare it. He guards against temptation; strives against sin; and employs every rational measure to fortify his mind against the solicitations of sense and the arts of corruption. For this purpose he meditates in the law of God: exercises himself to godliness; cultivates the life and power of piety; courts the presence and influences of the Holy Ghost; lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit. He attends on the ordinances of religion; fulfils the outward calls of duty; and, in all that he does, labours to be spiritually-minded, to do it from the heart, and as unto the Lord.

But is this the case with the unregenerate? Do they avoid temptation? Do they resist sin? Do they guard against the encroachments of selfishness, indolence and carnality? eagerly avail themselves of the means of spiritual improvement, and vigorously endeavour to get into the heart and substance of piety, and to be continually engaged and occupied with the work of God? No; they hate every thing that is vital and spiritual in religion. If ever they attend upon its ordinances or engage in its exercises, it is with formality and indifference. If they avoid flagrant and monstrous eruptions of vice, they will

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at least indulge in less gross and disgusting acts of wickedness. If they are not ringleaders in corrupting and debauching their brethren, they have the baseness to follow in the rear of the abandoned, and to imitate the example of the profane and profligate. If they will not run to the excess of riot, and work unrighteousness with greediness, they will at least cherish in their hearts the love of evil, and dwell with delight on what is forbidden. And can you say of such men as these, that they consent unto the law that it is good? that they dread the appearance of evil? and delight in the will of God after the inward man?

We have thus seen that religion produces a great and thorough change upon the heart and the life; that it does not in this world render the Christian perfect; but that amidst all his weaknesses and imperfections, he is essentially different from the irreligious and the carnal.

Let none, therefore, who hate sin with a perfect hatred, and are longing for complete conformity to the will of God; be discouraged, however far you may be from perfection, and however much you may be ashamed and grieved for your own offences. We cannot expect complete freedom from sin, nor the full enjoyment of the image of God, till we reach that blessed world where we shall see him as he is, and where he is all in all. It is well that you know the value of his favour, and are longing for meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. The ruin of men is, that they dislike the image of God: that madness and folly are in their hearts. that they are sold under sin, and led captives by their passions and vices. To resist evil, to mourn over besetting sins, to aim at perfect holiness, and perseveringly to pray to be sanctified wholly; are encouraging symptoms, and inspire the hope, that however far you may be from the possession of the holiness that you covet, you are under the renovating influences of the Spirit of grace, and on the road to the enjoyment of holiness and God. If you were dead in trespasses and sins, these matters would give you no uneasiness whatever. The more ready you are to detect your own faults and imperfections, and the more rigid in

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reprobating yourselves for your offences; it is the more favourable proof of a regenerated state. The quick-sighted discern motes in the sun-beam, when the blind cannot perceive the most lofty mountains: and "many a groan comes from the sick-bed, but none from the grave."

But though it is no conclusive evidence that you are in a natural state, because you are prevented from doing the good that you love, and are harassed with the evil that you hate: let all guard against abusing this precious truth, by imagining that they may sin with impunity. Those who know least what believing is, may tell you that sin cannot hurt the believer.

If there is no loss in the removal of the Divine favour, in the interruption of communion with God, and in the suspension of the joys of the Holy Ghost; then sin cannot hurt the believer. If there is no harm in having your graces wasted, your mind filled with remorse, consternation, and terror, your soul overrun with the most loathsome and ruinous corruptions, and your conscience exposed to the distractions and horrors of hell; then sin cannot hurt the believer. If there is no evil in vexing the hearts of the faithful and in opening the mouths of enemies to blaspheme; in dishonouring the ever blessed God, in grieving the Spirit of grace, and tearing open the wounds of your bleeding and dying Redeemer; then sin cannot hurt the believer. If there is no injury in throwing away the joys of salvation, in piercing yourselves through with the most dreadful sorrows; in going all your days in the sadness of your spirits, and imbittering the pungency of your death-bed regrets; then sin cannot hurt the believer, and you may freely yield to its suggestions. But if you dread these things worse than chains and slavery, than death and hell; O do not the abominable thing which Jehovah hates. Give no place unto Satan. Resist unto blood, striving against sin; and rather die than wound your own peace, and crucify the Son of God afresh.

You have need of constant watchfulness and the most unbending resolution. You are renewed only in part,

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and sin is far from being entirely eradicated. It had originally hold of the heart: and whatever has first possession of the soil, unless totally rooted out, is not easily kept under. Upon the least remission of the husbandman's care, it will throw up its shoots, and gradually overspread the ground. And if we are guilty of the slightest relaxation of our vigilance, sin will instantly exert its energy, and strive to regain its lost dominion. It is wholly through the power of an opposite principle that it is subdued and displaced. This principle is renewing and sanctifying grace; which is not at our command, but dispensed by the Holy Ghost, at any time, and in any measure that he pleases.

We cannot treasure it up, preserve, nor confine it. By our diligence to-day, we may provide for the demands of to-morrow. In the preceding seasons we may guard against the cold and storms of winter: and when a drought is foreseen or a famine apprehended, by timely supplies we may fearlessly encounter all their privations. But by what art can we treasure up the balmy influences of spring, or retain the light and heat of summer? And we too may fill the memory with the words of truth, and exercise ourselves to habits of probity and piety. But by what means are we to command the operations of the eternal Spirit, or store up the vivifying and refreshing communications of his grace? His grace is a blessing for which we must have renewed recourse, according to our returning difficulties and exigencies. It is our daily bread, for which we must make daily application. The corn of human culture may be preserved in magazines; but the manna, which came down from heaven, could not be hoarded up. It required to be gathered day by day. And if we remit our watchfulness, or restrain the exercise of humble, persevering, believing prayer; the Spirit, grieved and dishonoured, may withdraw his strengthening and purifying presence, and leave us to the melancholy and debasing power of the sin that most easily besets us.

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CHAPTER IX.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM DESERTION.

"The Lord can clear the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night;
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight."

Of all the afflictions with which the soul can be visited, none is more painful and overwhelming than the loss of Divine consolation, and the hidings of the light of God's countenance. Life lies in his favour, and his loving-kindness is better than life. Blessed is the man whom he chooseth, and causeth to approach unto himself. It is his presence which irradiates heaven, and clothes all its happy fields with light and gladness; which invests the ordinances of religion with life and sweetness: and gives dignity and elevation to the believer's mind, and serenity and delight to his heart.

When this is imparted, the Christian can undertake any service, or endure any suffering for the sake of his Saviour and Lord. He can rejoice in tribulation, and glory in the cross. In the midst of the most severe and complicated trials, he possesses a peace which passeth all understanding, and a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. But when the Divine presence is withheld or withdrawn, the ordinances lose their value; the soul is deprived of its liveliness and tranquillity; darkness and confusion take possession of the mind, and fill it with unutterable fear, despondence, and anguish. This has, accordingly, extorted from the saints the bitterest exclamations of sorrow; and it wrung from the dying Redeem-

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er the most painful and affecting complaint that ever reached the ears of the Eternal.

In contributing to the relief of those who are deprived of the sensible communication of the Divine favour, and subjected to the loss of that spiritual peace and consolation which in their happier days they enjoyed, we shall consider,

I. The circumstances in which the believer suspects that God has forsaken him.

II. The causes which occasion desertion, and,

III. The comfort which the Gospel has provided for the deserted.

I. The circumstances in which the believer suspects that God has forsaken him.

This is the melancholy conclusion to which the believer is often reduced, when he obtains no return to his prayers, when he derives no sensible advantage from the ordinances of religion, when he labours under languor and barrenness in duty, when he experiences no success in his benevolent services, and is subjected to multiplied and lengthened temporal trials.

A Christian is often led to regard himself as in a state of desertion,

1. When he receives no return to his prayers.

Prayer is an interesting, invaluable privilege. What can be more delightful, honourable, and profitable, than free access into the presence of the King of kings, liberty to pour out our hearts fully before him, and permission to ask what we will?

In scripture we have the most earnest exhortations to pray, and the most strong and encouraging promises of a gracious return to our supplications. Jehovah styles himself the hearer of prayer, and assures us that all things whatsoever we shall ask in prayer believing, we shall receive. And when the intimations of a kind acceptance of our requests are so numerous and positive; is it any wonder, when an answer is withheld to his petitions, that the Christian should fear that God has forsaken him; and

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that, in anger at his offences, God has covered himself with a cloud, so that his prayers cannot pass through?

The believer is led to apprehend that he is forsaken,

2. When he derives no sensible advantage from the ordinances of religion.

The ordinances are precious to the soul of the saint. There God has promised his presence, and there the Christian is frequently honoured to enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Ghost, and to possess blissful anticipations of the delights and employments of the world of glory.

When in the ordinances God lifts up the light of his countenance, they are endowed with an indescribable life and sweetness. The Christian can then give unreserved utterance to all his wants in prayer, and lift up his soul with elevation and ecstacy in praise. The preaching of the word then drops as the rain, and distils as the dew. It comes to him as water to the thirsty, and floods to the dry ground. With what enlargement of heart does he then go to the holy table! He then goes to the altar of God, to God his exceeding joy. There Jehovah makes all his goodness pass before him. There he makes him eat of his pleasant meat, and drink of his generous and refreshing wine. He brings him into his banqueting-house, and spreads over him the banner of love. As the heavenly-fed and soul-strengthened believer retires from the hallowed spot, he is made to exclaim, "It is good to be here! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

But if God withhold or withdraw his presence, however fair and promising the ordinances may appear, all their majesty and beauty vanish, and all their life and efficacy are blasted. Over them all we may inscribe, Ichabod: for their glory is departed. They are then as wells without water, or dry bones to a hungry soul. Under them all the Christian makes no progress, acquires no strength, and enjoys no comfort. And whilst others are edified and comforted, but he himself continues languid and lifeless; whilst the dew of Divine influence falls copiously on all around, but his own soul remains dry and withered·

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it is no matter of surprise that he should write bitter things against himself, and suspect that the Lord has forsaken him, and that his God has forgotten him. In such a painful situation, it is sometimes almost impossible to avoid crying, "Lord, where are thy former loving-kindnesses? Where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained? How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?

The believer sometimes considers himself as in a state of desertion, because,

3. He labours under deadness and formality in duty.

The law of the Lord is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And the Christian never can be satisfied till he gives to God what is required. Every degree of liberty and enlargement in duty delights and transports him: but every thing bordering upon lukewarmness and insensibility fills him with alarm and distress.

This, however, is frequently his painful experience. The sabbath comes: but he feels none of a sabbath's frame. The sanctuary unfolds its gates, and the sounds of the everlasting Gospel fall upon his ear: but none of its life and power enters his heart. His closet opens to receive him: but though time after time he falls on his knees, lamenting the dryness, languor, and formality of his spirit; he can wring no sigh of contrition from his heart; and is obliged to tear himself from the throne of grace, without enjoying any of that tenderness, warmth, and elevation of soul, which constitute the very life and substance of devotion.

When, therefore, he knows that Christ has promised to baptize his people with the Holy Ghost, and that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; is it any cause of astonishment that, in these melancholy moments, the believer should draw the most dreadful conclusions respecting his own condition, and suspect that the Lord has cast him off, and will be favourable no more?

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Some are led to adopt the same mournful apprehension,

4. From the want of success in their pious and beneficent undertakings.

From the day that you were taught to love the Lord with your whole heart, you began to love your neighbour as yourselves. Assured that it is the consummation of human duty and happiness, to know, love, serve, and enjoy the Lord; your great labour and study have been to bring all to the knowledge and enjoyment of God. This has been your object in your prayers, in your circulation of the Scriptures, in your contributions for the extension and establishment of the gospel, in your efforts for the instruction of the young, for the relief and comfort of the aged, and for the improvement and welfare of all mankind.

When, therefore, you have the command of God, enjoining you to do good unto all as you have opportunity; and his promises, holding forth the certainty that he will accept your services, and bless the work of your hands; and yet find, that your most pure and benevolent exertions are reviled and resisted, and that just in proportion as you spend and are spent in labours of faith and of love, vice and profligacy abound; you begin to tremble lest the Lord will accept no offering at your hand; and that, on account of your worldliness and worthlessness, he has rejected both your persons and your services.

Others are led to draw a similar conclusion,

5. From the long continuance of severe temporal trials.

As long as your strength is equal to your day, and you are blessed with the Divine presence and support, no trouble nor affliction can move you. So far from being oppressed with your trials, you can not only possess your soul in patience, but even glory in tribulation. But when your sufferings are multiplied or prolonged, and the Comforter, who should relieve your souls, is far from you; when you look for light, but behold darkness; for a time of health, but behold trouble; when, instead of diminishing the burden, the Lord seems to increase the load; when, instead of easing your complaints and granting

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you the desires of your hearts, he aggravates your calamities and answers you by terrible things in righteousness: this is discouraging and alarming indeed. This overwhelms you with fear, and induces you to apprehend that by your offences you have provoked his displeasure, and that he has let loose his hand against you, and is consuming you with all his terrors.

On these occasions your trouble may be often augmented by the foul and detestable suggestions of Satan. If the Lord be but slightly displeased, the enemy of all goodness eagerly helps forward the affliction. If the Lord lay on you the rod of correction; Satan will eagerly seize it, to convert it, if possible, into a rod of iron, with which he may crush you. If the Lord administer a salutary draught; Satan will labour to infuse poison into the cup, in order to destroy you. He will secretly assail you with such insinuations as these: "Can you be the objects of Divine love; and yet exposed to such lengthened and complicated sorrows? Can God retain any regard for your welfare, and yet leave you to struggle alone with your afflictions? Will a tender-hearted parent abandon his sick and languishing child? And if you retained any interest in the affections of the Most High, would he neither remove nor mitigate your troubles? Would he withdraw from you in the midst of your distress, and neither cheer you with the light of his countenance, nor support you with the communications of his grace? This evil is of the Lord: what should you wait for the Lord any longer?"

Such are the principal circumstances in which believers are led to suspect that God has forsaken them.

Let us now attend,

II. To the causes of desertion.

These, however numerous and various, may be divided into two great classes; the appointment of God, and our own sinfulness.

Desertion sometimes arises,

1. From the appointment of God.

From the number and greatness of our sins; from the

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inexhaustible provision made in the gospel for our perpetual happiness and comfort; and from the repeated promises of peace and joy to them who love the Lord and are steadfast in his covenant; many suppose that God never forsakes us, till we have criminally departed from him; and that, if we would walk more closely with him, we should be strangers to every species of distress and sorrow, and be able at all times to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. They imagine that to affirm the contrary, would deprive us of all confidence in the word of God, relax the motives to activity and watchfulness, and hold out as much encouragement to the slothful and formal professor, as to the humble, self-denied, and devoted disciple.

Since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and in every thing we offend; there can be no doubt that every case of desertion originates directly or remotely in a sinful cause, and that God is perfectly just in the most painful dispensations of this nature with which any of his people are visited.

But if, while we maintain that all have sinned, we also admit that there are very different degrees of guilt; we shall find little difficulty in acknowledging that believers are sometimes forsaken in the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, without any criminal cause on their part, but in order to try their faith, and improve and strengthen their graces.

If desertion were always the effect of our own sinfulness, it would uniformly be represented as our own work, as criminal, or at least as the punishment of a crime. And instead of any provision being made for the support and comfort of the deserted, they would be reproved and threatened, and ministers would be commissioned to harrow up their consciences with remonstrances against their past treachery and baseness, and denunciations of future judgments against their perverse and rebellious conduct.

But instead of speaking of desertion as our own work, it is mentioned as the work of God. It is not designated by the names of backsliding, revolt, apostasy, or any other term which should induce us to conclude that it is always

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the effect of our sin and folly. It is described by God's forsaking us, hiding his face from us, and casting off our soul.* Instead of ascribing their loss of comfort to their own carelessness and carnality, we find the saints in desertion frequently inquiring into the reasons why he withholds his wonted loving-kindness. "Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Why standest thou afar off, O God? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" If desertion is invariably the fruit of our own transgressions; instead of telling us in such a situation that we have a just cause of fear, instead of denouncing indignation and wrath against our sins; why does he expostulate with his people upon the unreasonableness of their alarms, and address them in language such as this?—"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." "Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. I have graven thee on the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

We frequently read of the sufferings, distresses, and tribulations of believers. But if it were unjust in God to forsake his saints except as a punishment for their sins; it must be equally unjust to subject them to affliction, except when they have offended him by their transgressions. According to this idea, the greatest sufferers must be the greatest sinners, and Job must have been wicked beyond all the men of the east. But how is this to be reconciled with the declaration of our blessed Lord, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten?"

* Psal. xxii. 1; xxx. 7; xxxviii. 21; xliv. 24; lxxvii. 7—9; lxxxviii. 14. Isa. liv. 7, 8.

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And if the people of God may thus be occasionally visited with affliction, without having provoked the chastisement by their criminal conduct; there seems no reason that desertion must invariably be the result of their secret backslidings or of their open sins.

Desertion is indeed painful, but it is peculiarly salutary and profitable.

It enhances the value of the Divine presence and favour, and makes us cleave to God with more fixed and determined resolution. The worth of our blessings is seldom fully known till they are lost, or endangered. Never was Elisha so sensible of the importance of Elijah's society, as when the latter was on the point of being taken from his head. And never is the value of the Divine favour so clearly seen and so highly prized, as when we are on the point of being deprived of it, or find that it is actually withdrawn.

Desertion increases our watchfulness against temptation and our activity and ardour in duty. We are never so solicitous to please an endeared friend, as when we suspect that we shall be obliged to forego his society, and be separated from him for years, or for life. And when does the Christian manifest the greatest tenderness of heart, the most ardent love of things heavenly and divine, and the most intense desire to know and do the will of God? It is when mourning over his departed delights, and longing for the restoration of those spiritual consola tions, which had formerly constituted the joy and rejoicing of his heart. It is then that there is the greatest diligence to guard against all evil, the most fervent following after God, and the most elevated ideas of the value of the presence and grace of the eternal Spirit.

Desertion tries and discovers our graces. It is easy to trust the Lord when every thing succeeds according to our wish, and nothing occurs to disturb our peace or alarm our fears. But to be able to wait upon God even in the way of his judgments; to be able to hope even against hope, and like Job to say, though he slay me yet will I trust in him: this shows a deep acquaintance with the

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power and faithfulness of God, and a love which many waters cannot quench nor the floods drown. Such is the spirit frequently brought into action in seasons of desertion. Like David, the believer exclaims, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill of Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."

Desertion prepares us for relishing more the return of consolation, and qualifies us for ministering to the comfort of those who are in similar trouble. Those are best able to appreciate the worth of health, who have been subjected to the severest sickness. The best guides are those who have travelled the same roads. The most useful counsellors are those who have been involved in perplexity like what we experience. And who can know so well the blessedness to be found in the light of the Divine countenance, as those who have longest walked in darkness? and who are so fit to sooth the sorrows and revive the hopes of those who are forsaken of the Lord, as those who have been cast out from his presence and obliged for a time to go mourning without the sun?

And if desertion is thus calculated to promote our spiritual improvement and future usefulness; it is no more inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of the Most High, than the temporary restraints imposed upon the patient, are inconsistent with the skill and benevolence of the physician. Nor does it argue a breach of faithfulness, any more than an answer to our prayers, not in kind but in loving-kindness, or the early death of pious youths; imply a violation of his promises of a gracious return to our petitions, and a long life to obedient children.

But though God in his wisdom sometimes forsakes his people, in order to try and exercise their graces; we may observe, that this is very seldom the case, and that de-

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sertion commonly is the consequence of our own folly, perverseness, and sinfulness.

He is the Father of mercies and the God of love. He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. If ever he restrain the manifestations of his kindness, and lift the rod of correction, we may in general rest assured that there is both a cause for his displeasure, and some valuable purpose to be accomplished by the chastisements which he inflicts.

Any sin may provoke him to withdraw the light of his countenance, and to involve us in spiritual darkness and distress. The most common causes however of desertion are apostasy of heart, remissness and formality in duty, and known and open sin.

Desertion is frequently occasioned,

1. By apostasy of heart.

It is from this that all our crimes and sufferings proceed. They begin in an evil heart of unbelief, that wickedly departs from the living God. Till its influence, however, appears by the neglect of some positive duty, or the commission of some open sin; it cannot attract the notice of our fellow-creatures, and may even escape our own. But there is not a single temper, principle, nor disposition within us, that can elude the eyes of the Omniscient, or impose upon the knowledge of Him that made us. He most distinctly sees, and most thoroughly knows the first risings and movements of this accursed evil.

If therefore, whilst our conduct continues decent and correct, we are beginning to backslide in heart; if whilst we retain our religious profession, and persevere in our attendance upon the ordinances and exercises of devotion, we are beginning to lose the spirituality of our own minds, and to fall from our first love; if we are beginning to undervalue the Divine presence, and to indulge a trifling and worldly spirit; if we are satisfying ourselves with the shadow of piety, but careless of the life and power of godliness; it is impossible to retain the light of his countenance and to exult in the joys of his salvation. Will he confer his favours on those by whom they are not prized? Will he diffuse the peace and the hope which

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his Spirit inspires, in that heart which is treacherously departing from himself, and following after its idols?

His dispensations towards us are generally regulated by our conduct towards him. Them that honour him he will honour; but they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed. When we cleave to him with purpose of heart, walk with him by faith, and prefer him to our chief joy; he feasts us with fat things, feeds up with hidden manna, and makes all his paths towards us tenderness and love. But if we become unsteadfast in his covenant, or walk contrary to him; he also will walk contrary to us, and make us reap of the fruit of our ways, and fill us with our own devices. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.

If this is our case, the Lord will remove from us the light of his countenance, and the consolations of his Spirit; he will meet us with one distress and sorrow, with one calamity and suffering after another; till we are humbled for our offences, and led in earnest to seek his favour. "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their sin, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." Thus while the holy importunity of Jacob detained the angel of the covenant till the break of day, and the affectionate entreaties of the disciples constrained the seemingly reluctant Saviour to abide with them; how severely did the spouse smart for indolently declining to give immediate admission to her kind and condescending Lord?*

Whenever therefore, without being conscious of any open sin, you become sensible of a loss of religious peace and joy; you have reason to fear that some Achan has gotten into the camp; that some secret apostasy is begun; that there is an inward departure from the Lord. Your business is instantly to examine your hearts, to search whether or not any iniquity has gained an ascendency there. For though some imagine that all is safe as long as sin does not break out in the life, no delusion can be more false and ruinous. As every man thinketh in his

* Song v. 6.

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heart so is he. The life may be comparatively blameless, when the heart is in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Spiritual wickednesses, from being the most secret and insidious, are by far the most dangerous and destructive. "Satan neither drinks, nor swears, nor commits sins of the flesh, and yet he is a devil." And you may be free from gross vice, and yet be dead in trespasses and sins.

Desertion is sometimes produced,

2. By remissness and formality in duty.

The Lord Jehovah did not form us for a life of indolence and ease. He did not load us with the bounties of his providence, nor surround us with the riches of his grace, merely in order to multiply our temporal comforts, and enable us to spend our time in mean and ignoble indolence. He formed us for himself, that we might shew forth his praise. Whatever may be our talents or our station, he requires us to love him with our whole heart, and to serve him with all our strength and mind. He tells us that we are not our own. He enjoins us to glorify him in our body and spirit which are his; and to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in his work.

Though we were to reserve every feeling and every affection for him; though we were to consecrate to him and to his cause every moment of our time, and every particle of our strength; we could not even then love him too strongly, nor serve him too actively and earnestly. Our obligations to him are innumerable and immense; and all the energies of our nature, though exerted in his service throughout the whole range of an endless existence, never can requite the infinite debt of grateful affection that we owe him.

If therefore, while we are thus bound to know nothing but him, and to spend and be spent for his sake; we become slothful and remiss in his service; can we expect to enjoy the fruits of his love, or share in the peace and gladness of his obedient children? Can the trifler make the same progress with the ardent and indefatigable student? Can the wayward and turbulent son possess the same marks of his father's approbation, as his obedient and in-

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dustrious brother? And whilst we are indifferent about our spiritual mercies; whilst we neglect the duties which God exacts, or are cold, remiss, and formal, in those which we render; what ground have we to expect that he will dignify us with the marks of his friendship, or enrich and bless us with the elevating and endearing communications of his grace? If we would wish to walk in the light of his countenance, and to be exalted in his righteousness, we must abide in his love, and set him continually before us: we must live under the powers of the world to come; and forgetting the things that are behind, reach forth unto those that are before, and press on towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ: we must comply with every intimation of his pleasure; and whatever we do, do with our might, and heartily, and as unto the Lord, and not unto man. In heaven the saints never languish in their love, nor wander from their duty; and their sun no more goes down, neither does their moon withdraw her shining. If we were more like them in our spirit and temper; if our hearts were more constantly filled with the love of God, and our hands occupied with his work; our consolations and joys would have a brighter and closer resemblance to theirs. We should seldom have cause to complain of doubts and of darkness. Our peace would be as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea.

But if the Divine presence be lost by secret apostasy, and by remissness and formality in duty, it must much more certainly be forfeited,

3. By known and open sin.

Sin is irreconcilably repugnant to the nature of God. It is the abominable thing which he hates. What friendly intercourse then can we maintain with those who commit it. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Open sin is such a flagrant violation of his law; it is so utterly inconsistent with the Christian character; it tends so much to embolden others in transgression, and to set his authority at defiance; that, so far from maintaining any kindly fellow-

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ship with those who indulge it, he has threatened to punish it severely, and has actually inflicted the most awful judgments even on his own people, who have ventured on this vile and forbidden ground. And if ever we shall presume to offend him, we must lay our account with the most signal chastisement. For this is a standing and immutable rule in his righteous administration, "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes."

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CHAPTER X.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

"Lord! shine on this benighted heart,
With beams of mercy shine!
And let thy healing voice impart
A taste of joys divine."

Let us now attend,

III. To the provision which the Gospel contains for the support and encouragement of the deserted.

Whether this heavy calamity arises from a sinful or a sinless cause; if you retain your love to God, and your attachment to the Saviour; if you are mourning his absence, and humbled and ashamed for the evils which you have done; if you are longing for the restoration of his favour, and seeking his face with your whole heart and soul; however much reason you may have to be cast down, you have no cause for despair. This distress for his absence and this restless impatience for his return, are a token for good; and a proof, that though he has withdrawn the light of his countenance, it is only for a time, and that he has not forsaken you for ever.

If you have reason to fear that, by some secret sin, or open transgression, you have moved him to jealousy, and provoked him to hide his face from you; then let me ask, Are you bewailing your guilt and folly in all the pungency of grief, and in all the bitterness of a broken heart? Does the remembrance of your ungrateful treachery and criminal baseness, lead you to weep in secret places, and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes? Are you daily spread-

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ing your offences before the Lord; and endeavouring, by renewed application to the blood of sprinkling, to obtain the remission of your iniquity, and the recovery of his presence and love?

If this is your case, then be of good cheer. However painful and deplorable your condition may seem, all shall yet be well. Though your sinfulness may be great; yet if you again flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you, you shall in no wise be cast out. Though your guilt may be great, and its natural consequences most dreadful; no offences are too foul, nor any case too desperate for the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we not told that his blood cleanseth from all sin? and that he is able to save to the utmost them that come unto God by him? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Sinners, who never knew his grace, who never entertained any desire for his salvation, who have run to the excess of riot and covered themselves over with impiety and crime; are invited, encouraged, commanded to come to him for life; and are assured that, on their application, none of their trespasses shall be mentioned or brought into mind.

If therefore you have fallen by your iniquity, return instantly to the Lord your God. Take with you words and turn to him. Go to the compassionate and adorable Redeemer, as if you had never gone before. Your case cannot now be more dismal and desperate than it was, when Jesus first found you, lying in your blood, and cast out to the loathing of your soul. And did he bid you live when you were dead in trespasses and sins? And will he now refuse to revive, or maintain the work of his hands? Did he stop you in your rebellious and ruinous career, when you were sinning with a high hand, and revolting more and more? And will he reject your petition and your cry, when prostrate in submission at his feet, and lifting up the voice of penitence and prayer? If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.'

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And whilst thus we are enjoined to exercise forgiveness to our offending brother, can we believe that similar compassion shall not be found in the God of grace towards his repenting children? We have heard that the kings of Isreal are merciful kings. And we know that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.—Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

If you can discover no particular cause for your sorrow; if your conscience bear you witness in the Holy Ghost that you have been endeavouring in faith and in earnest to walk with God in peace and equity; to allow no iniquity to obtain dominion over you; that you have preferred God to your chief joy; that it has been your heart's desire and prayer to abide in his love, and to live under the powers of the world to come; then you have reason to conclude that this painful dispensation is not the effect of Divine displeasure, but intended merely for the trial of your faith and patience. Your duty is to submit to it with calmness and resignation: and till God is pleased to restore the light of his countenance and the joys of his salvation, for your encouragement and support, recall the former instances of his favour, and reflect on the immutability of his love.

If ever you have really tasted that he is gracious, you may safely rely on the permanence of the good work which he has begun. Apparent grace may be lost. From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have. But real religion is the gift of God, which he will not revoke; and his own work, which he will never forsake. Blazing meteors may soon disappear; but the stars keep their stations, and the sun continues from age to age to shine in the greatness of his strength. Preparatory grace may give way. Every child does not

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arrive at manhood; and many of the fairest blossoms are blasted, and yield no fruit. And many professors who have run well for a season, and have had the most imposing religious appearance, have afterwards drawn back, and walked no more with Jesus. But genuine godliness is an enduring principle, which will never fail. The righteous holdeth on his way, and he that hath clean hands waxeth stronger and stronger. True grace may suffer a decline, and the Christian may be guilty of many a shameful and hurtful fall. In temptation he may be severely tried and sorely shaken: but though the heel may be bruised, the head is safe. The exercise of grace may be restrained, and its consolations for a time suspended: whilst the sacred principle itself retains its existence, and shall sooner or later recover all its former strength and beauty. Planted by the hand of the Almighty, and perpetually under his protection and care, it shall spring up in spite of all opposition, outbrave the fury of every storm, and flourish in undecaying verdure, when tempests shall cease to beat, and the very region in which they were engendered, and where they spent their violence, shall be known no more. The gifts and the callings of God are without repentance. He rests in his love: he hateth putting away: and whom he loves, he loves unto the end. Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth; and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, if ever the righteous were forsaken, if ever a believer had cause to be ashamed of his hope, if ever the Lord abandoned his inheritance, or finally withdrew his love from a single soul whom he had drawn to himself, and led to fix his affections on things unseen and eternal? Could you assemble the redeemed of the Lord into one, to the praise of the glory of his grace, they would unanimously declare that Jesus is faithful to his trust, that to his sheep he gives eternal life, and that they can never perish, neither can any pluck them out of his hand. He and they are one. Their interests are identified with his own; and because he lives they shall live also. "Who then shall separate you from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress,

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or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

But perhaps you can derive no comfort from your past experience. You suspect that you never have been the subject of a gracious change. You fear that your former religion has been a perfect delusion; a shadow without a substance; a form without the life and power of godliness.

If this is the case then, you must look into the present state of your heart, and take an impartial and careful survey of its desires and feelings.

Whenever a final separation takes place betwixt God and a soul, it is mutual and complete. The Lord not only removes the light of his countenance, and the consolations of his Spirit, but likewise withdraws his secret and urgent applications to the sinner's heart and conscience. The man not only loses all his religious joy and comfort, but also renounces all concern for what is serious, and either sinks into a state of deep and impenetrable security, or else returns to a course of open impiety and profligacy. When love vanishes, it is seldom that it is succeeded even by indifference: its place is generally occupied by dislike or enmity. And when the Spirit of the Lord retires from a soul, his place is immediately occupied by a spirit of a very different description. Hostility and discord ensued, whenever Abimelech and the men of Shechem lost their mutual regard. And no sooner had the Spirit of the Lord forsaken Saul, than an evil spirit troubled him. And whenever a soul is finally forsaken, as the departure always begins on the side of the creature, the breach is mutual. The man retains no love to religion, nor any longing after God. He not only loses his apparent comfort, but even the semblance of piety. In such an awful situation, the dreadful language which God employs by his prophet, is uniformly realized: "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." The apostate generally plunges into gross vice, and becomes a scoffer at vital godliness. But at all events he has no impressive nor abiding sense of his guilt and danger; he has

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no hatred of sin; and little or no uneasiness respecting the issue of his course. He is twice dead: dead by nature, and though for a season roused to some degree of seriousness, and apparently assuming the principles of spiritual life, the temporary agitation and alarm having once subsided, he sinks anew into that torpor from which nothing shall ever awake him. His conscience is seared as with a hot iron. As he did not like to retain God in his knowledge, God gives him over to blindness of mind and hardness of heart. Instead of being affected by his fearful condition, he becomes perfectly confident of his safety. Emancipated from, what he calls, the terrors of superstition, he lives in gaiety and pleasure, works unrighteousness with greediness, glories in his shame, and perversely asserts his innocence and safety, even when addicted to those practices against which God has most clearly denounced the most awful visitations of his wrath.

Now is this your case? Have you a secret aversion to every thing spiritual and sacred? Have you an inward attachment to every thing foolish and trifling? Do you withdraw from the ordinances of religion; and neglect the exercises of devotion? Do you cast off the restraints of piety; and walk in the sight of your eyes and the ways of your own heart? Do you indulge in sensuality and sin; and retain no love nor longing after God and things divine? If this were your condition, you would have just cause to tremble for your dreadful state: for more sturdy evidence could not be given of a depraved heart and of a corrupt mind.

But if conscious to yourselves that this is such a spirit as you dread and deprecate; if instead of viewing salvation with indifference, you regard it as the one thing needful, and would cheerfully part with the wealth of ten thousand worlds to obtain clear satisfying proof of your own union to Christ and interest in his righteousness: that so far from living in any known sin, you shun all appearance of evil, and are ashamed, heart-broken, and confounded for the iniquities which you have already wrought; that so far from shunning the duties and obligations which you owe to God, you delight in his law after the inner

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man, and are labouring to glorify him in your body and spirit which are his; that so far from undervaluing the consolations of religion and the light of God's countenance, you prefer his favour to your chief joy, and count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus: all this is a token for good. It demonstrates that, though cast down, you are not destroyed; that though in darkness and distress, you are neither finally forsaken, nor forgotten. However feeble, the least sigh, or motion, is a sign of life: and however faint, and imperfect, every degree of compunction for sin, every aspiration after holiness, every longing after God, intimates that spiritual life, however feeble, is not totally extinct; and that you still retain some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. When Jonah cried, "I am cast out of thy sight, yet will I look again toward thy holy temple;" when the spouse said, "I sleep, but my heart waketh; my Beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels moved for him;" this showed that however criminal and comfortless their state, they had not lost all spirituality of mind, nor were completely cast out from the Divine presence and favour. The root of the matter was still within them; and though their wickedness for a season corrected them, and their backslidings reproved them, their piety was revived and strengthened, and their consolations restored. And as long as you possess any sorrow for sin, and any earnest ardent longings after holiness and God; your case, though painful, is not desperate. The principle of grace is still alive; and Jesus will not forsake the work of his hands. He, who has begun the good work, will complete it. A bruised reed will he not break, the smoking flax will he not quench, till he bring forth judgment unto victory.

Your dejection and anguish for the loss of the Divine presence, and for the darkness of your understanding and the deadness of your heart; so far from arguing that your former religious joys were false and your experience delusive, prove that they were genuine and solid. You never mourn the absence of those whose presence you never possessed; nor regret the suspension of an intercourse

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which never was begun. And what do all your distress and sorrow for the absence of your Saviour, and all your restless and importunate desires and prayers for his return, intimate, but that you have really tasted of his love, and that you still delight in him as your portion and your all? Do the men of the world ever experience any such trouble and grief? Do they ever feel any regret for the absence of God; or manifest any strong and intense desires for the possession of the light of his countenance and the joys of his salvation? Do you ever hear them complaining, Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour? Do you ever find them inquiring, Saw ye him whom our soul loveth? Do you ever see them sunk in sorrow, and bending beneath the burden of a broken heart, because they can do no more to his honour, acquire no more conformity to his image, nor enjoy more of his presence and love?

Give them wealth and honour, mirth and amusement; and what care they for Divine communications or spiritual enjoyments? They despise the ordinances of religion; profane the sabbaths of the Lord; turn their backs upon the sanctuary; and remain unaffected by all the melting wonders of redeeming mercy, and all the boundless discoveries of celestial glory. If ever they engage in the exercises of piety, they draw near to God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their heart is far from him. To mourn an absent God, to bewail the loss of spiritual consolation and joy, to be humbled and ashamed on account of the coldness, stupidity, and insensibility of your souls; are all proofs that you possess another and a better spirit than the men of the world, that you are born from above, and sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession. The presence of these affections, and your incessant and strong desires for the recovery of your former spirituality of mind, and the restoration of your past felicity and joy; demonstrate that, though at present deprived of the light of God's countenance and the hopes of his salvation, he has called you out of darkness into light, and transferred your affections

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from the things that are seen and temporal, to those that are unseen and eternal. For if you had been without God; like the careless and the carnal around you, you would have been living to yourselves, minding earthly things, and in one form or other, loving and serving the creature more than the Creator.

How then came you to be exercised unto godliness? Why have you your conversation in heaven, and your fruit unto holiness? Who has made you to cleave to God with full purpose of heart, and follow hard after him, even when he most completely hides his face? This is all the work of the blessed Spirit; and without his sacred agency, you would have still been dead in trespasses and sins, and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and mind.

A consciousness of remaining imperfection, and a painful sense of indwelling-sin, so far from being indications of a reprobate mind, are the characteristics of a gracious state. Those who see may sometimes start at a shadow; but the blind will not shrink at the approach of a cannon-ball. The living may complain of a blow: but the dead cannot feel though crushed beneath the weight of a mountain. The Christian may tremble at the least frown which clouds the face of his heavenly Father, and cry out on the slightest motion of corruption: but the men of the world can sleep securely amidst the thunders of Sinai, and riot in unrighteousness, in defiance of the most tremendous denunciations of Almighty vengeance. If therefore you feel abhorrence of sin, love to God, zeal for his honour, and an earnest desire to be solaced and cheered with the light of his countenance, and the consolations of his Spirit; then your eternal all is safe. You are the objects of his affection, and the subjects of his grace. "For thus saith the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

You may experience much to excite your alarm and try your faith. You may receive no return to your prayers: for Jesus himself complained, Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? You

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may derive no sensible advantage from the ordinances of religion: for many of his children, who have been the most diligent in attending upon every external institution, have been compelled to cry, Oh that we knew where we might find him! You may languish under a sense of formality and deadness in duty: for this must have been the case with the Psalmist, when he was obliged to declare that his soul cleaved unto the dust, and entreated to be quickened according to God's word. You may discover no success attending your pious and beneficent undertakings: for can you ever forget who lamented that he had laboured in vain, and had spent his strength for nought, and in vain? You may be subjected to severe and long-continued trials; for what son is he whom his father chasteneth not? But while you continue to follow hard after God, to prefer his favour to your chief joy, and to count all but loss for his sake; however dark and distressing your frames may prove, your state is safe. These are not the feelings of nature. They are not the desires nor longings of the unrenewed mind. They are good gifts which come down from above. They descend from the Father of lights, and are the work of his blessed Spirit. And while they remain deeply seated in your heart, can you believe that God has finally forsaken you? If a man go from home, but leave his family and furniture behind: what is our inference? That his absence is merely temporary, and that he is determined to return. If he had renounced all interest in the place, and resolved to abandon it for ever, he would have carried all along with him, bag and baggage, and not have left a single article of his property upon the premises. And after God long laid siege to your heart, and by the mightiest operations of his marvellous love, succeeded in planting the graces of his Spirit in your souls: whilst these best and dearest pledges of his affection remain, can you persuade yourselves that he has renounced his conquest, and forsaken the work of his hands? If he had cast you off for ever, he would not only have extinguished your religious hope and joy, but also dismantled your soul of its graces and left it under the dreary and desolating power of vice and

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depravity. He would not only have concealed from you the smiles of his face, but also have recalled his Holy Spirit. He would not only have stripped you of your comforts, but also have withdrawn every trace of his sanctifying and purifying influence. If his departure had been final, every vestige of humility, contrition, and spirituality, would have been effaced, and your souls abandoned to all that impenetrable and death-like apathy which mark a reprobate mind and hardened heart. As long therefore as you retain any love to his name, any delight in his service, and longing for the enjoyment of his love, as long as you vigilantly exclude Satan and his emissaries, and faithfully reserve the citadel of the heart for the King of heaven: all these facts are endearing and decisive proofs that you belong to the God of glory. They are pledges that, however distant he may now appear, he will speedily return. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

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CHAPTER XI.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM TEMPORAL AFFLICTION.

"God's truth for ever stands secure;
He saves th' oppressed, he feeds the poor;
He sends the lab'ring conscience peace,
And grants the prisoner sweet release."

MAN is born to trouble: and by becoming Christians we are neither exempted from the ordinary calamities of life, nor rendered insensible to their number or severity. We are frequently subjected to sufferings and sorrows of our own, with which no stranger intermeddles: and though God sanctifies our trials, and gives us strength to bear them; still in themselves they are as painful to us as to any of those who are around us. We feel as acutely, as the worldly and the worthless, poverty and reproach, sickness and anguish. We witness with no less emotion than they, the pale countenance, the emaciated frame, and the sinking eye of a dying friend or brother; and follow with a heart as heavy as theirs to the house of silence, and hear with as great a thrill of sadness as they, the clods of the valley rattling on the coffin, which contains the remains of what was lately so lovely and ever must be dear.

As long, however, as your strength is equal to your day, and you are blessed with the Divine presence and support, none of these things can move you. Instead of yielding to despair, you can possess your souls in patience. Amidst the wreck and ruin of your best and most valued earthly comforts, you can lift up your head

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sublime; take a calm and steady view of the darkest and most terrific of the scene, and glory in the deepest and direst tribulation.

But when your distresses are multiplied or prolonged; and that God who, with the light of his countenance and the consolations of his grace, used to cheer and strengthen your heart, is far from helping you and from the words of your roaring: this fills you with perplexity and despondence, and makes you suspect that by your coldness, unkindness, and sinfulness, you have grieved his Holy Spirit, and provoked him to become your adversary. Knowing that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, and that God has engaged to keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on him; but finding that your own condition is desolate and dreary, that one comfort after another is wrested from your grasp, and that you are subjected to complicated and lengthened trials: you are ready to question the reality of your past religion, and to fear that you are still without God and without hope.

My suffering friends, you would have great cause indeed to adopt this melancholy conclusion, if you could show that affliction is always sent as a mark of the Divine displeasure, or reserved for the careless and the carnal, or sent as a punishment upon the faithful, without being fitted or designed to produce any valuable or salutary effect.

But is this any thing at all like the representation which the Bible gives us of its nature and design?

Does the Bible,

I. Represent affliction as the effect merely of the Divine displeasure?

Is this the inference that we are to draw from hearing the saints singing of judgment as well as of mercy? from the man being pronounced blessed whom the Lord correcteth and teacheth out of his law? from the declaration of the Psalmist, that it was good for him that he had been afflicted? or from the assurance of our blessed Lord, As many as I love I rebuke and chasten?

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Does the Bible,

II. Represent affliction as reserved only for the careless and the carnal?

It is certain that hereafter the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power; and that in the meantime many of their guilty pleasures are imbittered by remorse and shame, and that multitudes of the transgressors themselves are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest.

But the profane and carnal are not the only sufferers in this world of woe. It is only through much tribulation that any can enter into the kingdom. In the case of some of the dearest of the saints of God, afflictions have come so fast, and lasted so long, that they have had tears for their meat both in the night and day. Will you say that Job, David, Jeremiah, and the Apostles, were sinners above all the men of the ages in which they lived? Yet their trials were singularly numerous and severe: and in general none have received worse treatment than those of whom the world was most unworthy.

The ungodly prosper in the world: they increase in riches: they become old and are great in power: they are not in trouble as other men, neither plagued as other men: for they have their portion in this life. But God has provided some better thing for you. He has called you to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens. And in bringing you to glory, one of the measures which he employs, with the most blessed effect, is affliction.

Unless affliction is the lot of the children of God, why are they so frequently exhorted to cultivate patience and resignation? commended for their submission to the Divine will, and their fortitude under trouble? Why are support and consolation provided for them in seasons of suffering and sorrow? and a rich and everlasting recompense promised to them who magnanimously endure their toils and trials? They who shall reign with Christ, are they who now suffer with him. And if you look into heaven, say, Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? These are they who come out of

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great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

So far is affliction from being reserved for the worldly and the worthless, that, on the contrary, it is one of the marks of adoption, and a large portion of it is expressly assigned to the faithful. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons."

Does the Bible,

III. Represent affliction merely as the punishment of sin, and as productive of no useful nor salutary effect?

It is true indeed that there is no man that liveth and sinneth not. In many things we all offend. The very best men on earth are imperfect; and frequently chargeable with much that grieves the Spirit of grace, and provokes the eyes of the Divine glory. And as God will not allow sin to pass with impunity in his dearest children, there can be no doubt that believers often smart severely for their trespasses.

But whilst we distinctly admit that affliction is sometimes sent as a chastisement for our iniquities, and that God is perfectly just in the heaviest trials that we endure; nothing can be farther from the truth than to affirm that affliction is intended solely as a punishment of our transgressions, and productive of no beneficial consequences. Few blessings are more important and inestimable, than the prevention and cure of sin, conformity to the image of Christ, a discovery of the meaning and excellence of the promises, a love and a relish for spiritual enjoyments, increasing fervour in prayer, liberal supplies of Divine strength and consolation, frequent visits of the Spirit of God, and a growing meetness for future glory. On examination, however, you will find that these are some of the peaceable and precious fruits of righteousness that affliction yields.

1. It contributes to prevent and cure our sins.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately

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wicked. But its baseness and treachery never appear in a form more humbling, lamentable and awful, than in seasons of ease and prosperity. Though perpetually prone to backslide, it is then especially that it betrays its criminal tendency to depart from the living God; and that we are in greatest danger of overlooking the value of our spiritual treasures, and of taking up our rest and satisfaction in the empty and perishing trifles of earth and time. As long as his fortune lasted, the prodigal seems scarcely to have entertained a thought of his father: and if his wealth had increased or even continued, he never would have formed the resolution to return. But when his sub stance was spent; when the insidious attentions of his deceitful flatterers were withdrawn; when famine began to prey upon the people; and he himself was compelled, amidst hunger and nakedness, to submit to the disgrace and drudgery of feeding swine; he could no longer repel the recollection of the plenty that filled, and the peace and kindness that cheered his paternal habitation, nor resist the desire to arise, and go to his father. And when the world smiles on us, and we enjoy all the created comforts which we can wish; we are lamentably ready to relax our religious activity and ardour, to forget our absolute unceasing dependence upon the ever-blessed and all-sufficient Creator, and the transcendent worth and endless duration of the blessings which he bestows. But affliction rouses us from our lethargy. The loss of the things that we love, and the various trials and disappointments which we sustain, irresistibly convince us that this is not our rest, dissipate the airy and enchanting visions which health and prosperity had spread around us; unfix the grasp which earth had taken of our affections; lead us to set our hearts on the things that are above, and to seek our all from God. By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. By affliction iniquity is purged, and all the fruit is to take away our sin.

When therefore affliction has such a direct and power ful tendency to counteract the encroachments of a selfish, worldly, and lukewarm spirit, and to rouse you to consid eration, watchfulness, and prayer; can you really be in

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love with religion and prefer God to your chief joy, and yet regard adversity as an insupportable calamity, and deprecate it as an unmingled and incurable evil? Will you choose sin rather than affliction? the pleasures which perish with the using, rather than those pure, sublime, and boundless joys, which fill and feast the soul, and last for ever?

2. Affliction affords us the privilege of becoming conformed unto the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the perfection of beauty and of excellence. He is higher than the highest: in all, and through all, and over all. He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

Can any honour be higher? or any distinction more sublime, than to possess a resemblance to him who is so infinitely great, and so eternally blessed and glorious?

Yet this resemblance may be in part acquired, and greatly promoted by the patient endurance of affliction. Jesus was despised and rejected of men. His visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. Though he was a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

In this respect we are called to follow him. When opening the eyes of the blind; unstopping the ears of the deaf; when healing the sick with a word, raising the dead, and governing worlds, he did not stand still, and say, "Come and learn of me." It was when without a place where to lay his head; when subjected to obloquy and reproach; and enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself; that he said, Come and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Hence, his apostle asks, "What glory is it, if, when ye be buffetted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God, for even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not."

Persecution for the sake of righteousness, the hatred

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and hostility of the sons of Belial, distress and trouble in the cause of Christ and of a good conscience; are the badges of Divine nobility. These are the insignia of honour, with which Jesus in the meantime dignifies those on whose heads he shall hereafter place the crown of salvation. He himself was a man of sorrows. "And is the disciple above his master? or the servant above his lord? It is enough that the disciple be as his master, and the servant as his lord." And what honour on this side of heaven, or in heaven itself, can be more exalted or delightful than to be like the Son of God?

The exercise of the active graces may be accompanied with a greater degree of present splendour, and may even prove more profitable to the world; but exercise of the passive graces is not less worthy of admiration, nor less beneficial to your own soul. Though God is at all times infinitely glorious and lovely, never did his goodness appear in a more majestic and endearing form, than when the incarnate Saviour was seen bearing the contradiction of sinners against himself; led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, not opening his mouth; healing the wound of the ruffian who was sent to apprehend him; and in the agonies of death, recommending his murderers to the mercy of his Father.

And however criminal and ruinous to their authors; the scorn and derision, the malice and abuse of the worldly and worthless, give us an opportunity, which we never otherwise could have enjoyed, of manifesting the heavenly origin and matchless superiority of our principles. They give us an opportunity of loving our enemies, of blessing them that curse us, of doing good to them that hate us, of praying for them that despitefully use and persecute us; and of demonstrating that the very worst that earth and hell can attempt, to subdue or suppress our religious activity and ardour, only rivets us the more firmly to our duty, and gives tenfold strength to the bands of affection and zeal which bind our devoted hearts to the service of our Master.

And the trials and afflictions of life, however painful and severe, afford us a similar opportunity of signalizing

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the strength of our faith and the purity of our love. A hireling will fight for his pay, and a mercenary will abide in the work of his employer while it yields him greater gain than he could acquire by deserting it. But a friend or a son, will stand by a father or a benefactor, though at the peril of their own life; and rather than abandon the venerated object of their affection in his distress, receive the mortal blow of the assassin in their own breast. And while religion is accompanied with temporal ease and honour, hypocrites and formalists will make a flaming profession of piety, and outstrip many of the faithful themselves in their forwardness and courage. But when difficulties beset them, when dangers threaten, and tribulation and persecution arise because of the word; by and by they are offended, draw back, and walk no more with Jesus. But to cleave to him when the world frowns; to adhere to him the more firmly as our trials abound; to be able to hope even against hope; to wait on him even in the way of his judgments; and say, Though he slay me yet will I trust in him: this proves a genuine acquaintance with the perfections of his nature, and the tenderness of his heart: this bespeaks the faith of a Christian and the affection of a son; and demonstrates that we are possessed of a love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown.

And if this is the high and invaluable end of your afflictions; can you affirm, that, in the tribulations which have overtaken you, any strange thing has befallen you? Is there any more perfect, lovely, and glorious than the Lord Jesus Christ? And since he was made perfect through suffering, will you dread or deprecate those trials which are sent in love, and designed to promote your conformity to his image? Does a soldier consider it as a ground of rejoicing, that he is allowed to share in the dangers and privations of his general? And called unto the faith of the Gospel, and the hope of his eternal kingdom; can your hearts desire a higher honour, or the God of grace confer a nobler distinction, than the immense, the invaluable privilege of a fellowship in the sufferings of him, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and with

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whom you shall reign in righteousness for ever and ever? Rather rejoice in the tribulations that ye endure? and glory in your affirmities. They are the gifts of God, and the marks of peculiar, signal favour. "Unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Such trials are "a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer."

Jesus could easily have bestowed on you the power of working miracles: and you no doubt would have been delighted with the gift. You would have rejoiced to have gone about, multiplying the supplies of the poor, healing the sick, and opening the eyes of the blind. But this faculty he has withheld, and reserved for you a prerogative less brilliant but more sublime: the privilege of resembling himself in calm, patient, cordial submission to affliction and distress. Improve your privilege. Take up your cross and follow him through all the difficult and rugged steps in which he may be pleased to lead you.

3. Affliction unfolds the meaning, and displays the excellence of the promises.

If we were never sick, nor in want, we could have no idea of the value of medicine, nor of the importance of plenty. And though the Bible abounds with exceeding great and precious promises; unless we were occasionally in the circumstances of distress and of trouble to which they are exactly adapted, the worth and efficacy of many of the best and richest in all the volume of inspiration would remain unknown. Till their provisions were nearly spent, and a party of them had enjoyed a delicious repast upon a dish of clams, an insignificant shell-fish, which lodges in the sand, and which in their more prosperous days they had despised; the first settlers in New-England never discovered the meaning of that promise, "They shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of the treasures hid in the sand." And if we were never in sorrow, what conception could we form of the blessedness of them that mourn? If we were never tempted, what meaning could we attach to the language, "Blessed is the man that endureth

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temptation." If we were never in want, how could we justly appreciate the animating assurance, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus?" And if we were never called to pass through difficulties and dangers, how could we fully prize the gracious and astonishing declaration, "Fear not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God?"

Ease, health, and prosperity, have their attractions and their uses. But if we wish to live by faith, to be thoroughly acquainted with the whole will of God, and know the import and the excellence of all his words of truth and kindness; we shall find that a season of distress and of trial is highly unspeakably advantageous. "As darkness shews us worlds of lights we never saw by day;" a beauty, a majesty, and glory burst from the pages of inspiration in the night of affliction and sorrow, which the sunshine of prosperity had concealed.

4. Affliction enhances the value of our spiritual mercies, and makes us more sensible of the importance of an interest in the provisions of the everlasting covenant.

The prosperity of fools destroys them; and many believers have been deeply injured, in their spiritual health and growth, by a long continuance of worldly comforts. In these dangerous circumstances they are ready to forget their better and more enduring portion, and to lavish their affections on the empty and perishing trifles around them. But will you indulge in this criminal and ruinous state of mind in the dark day of adversity, or in the dreary night of death? In the light and heat of a summer's day, the child may carelessly rove from home, and entertain no wish to return. But let the rain descend, let the tempest blow, or an enemy present himself in his path: and instantly he will discover the perils of his ramblings, and long for the shelter of his father's house, and the kindness of his mother's arms.

And though, in prosperity, the Christian may sink into carelessness and security, and take up his satisfaction in the things around him; when health leaves him, friends forsake him, Satan rages, and the world frowns; when time recedes, and eternity with all its affecting realities rises on his

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view; he then most forcibly feels that this is not his rest. He then finds that by remitting his vigilance, and wandering from his refuge, he has exposed himself to inexpressible hazard, and most deeply hurt the best interests of his soul. He then sees that there is but one thing needful; and that the wealth of ten thousand worlds is not, for one moment, to be compared with union to the Saviour, and an interest in the great salvation. From the vanities and follies of life, from the pleasures and trifles of sense, we then instinctively and eagerly turn to our nobler and better inheritance; and cling with ardent intense avidity to the high hopes and inexhaustible consolations of the everlasting gospel. We are then compelled in the sincerity of our souls to cry, "To whom can we go but to thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee: my flesh and heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

5. Affliction gives life and fervour to prayer.

The child never cries more bitterly than when in distress; the prisoner never pleads more earnestly than when his life is in danger: and we are never more frequent, more humble, and importunate in our applications at the mercy-seat, than when assailed with trouble, and shaken with fear, stripped of our temporal enjoyments, and visited with severe and unexpected tribulation. Few saints appear to have been oftener in trouble, or involved in deeper distress, than David and Jeremiah. But none seem to have been more familiar with the throne of grace, or more enlarged and ardent in their supplications there.

In the time of health and prosperty our devotion often languishes. We are cold, short, and lifeless in our addresses to our heavenly Father. But affliction rouses us from our lethargy. It drives us to our knees. It fills our souls with alarm, and our mouths with arguments. It compels us to plead in earnest, and to wrestle with God like men who know that their all is at stake, and that they must either succeed or perish. Even the wicked themselves will visit God in trouble, and pour out a prayer when his chastening is upon them. How much more

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must suffering bring you to the footstool of the Most High, and constrain you to pour out the fulness of your hearts before him? To whom can the sick and suffering child more naturally apply, than to his kind-hearted father? And, when you have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to whom in all your griefs and fears, can you more reasonably, more hopefully repair, than to him who knows your frame, who is touched with the feeling of your infirmities, and who has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee?" "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

If, therefore, you know the worth of prayer, and value communion with the Father of your spirits and the God of love, fear not the approach of adversity. This will break up the dulness and sluggishness, the lukewarmness and formality which insensibly steal in upon your affections. This will discover your weakness and wants, multiply your errands to the seat of mercy, and give warmth, force and perseverance, to your intercessions.

"Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring us to his feet,
Lay us low, and keep us there."

6. Affliction is the occasion of bringing down more plentiful supplies of spiritual strength and consolation.

Among the many precious words which the Bible contains, few are more encouraging and refreshing than those promises in which God assures us; that as our days, so also shall our strength be, that his grace is sufficient for us, and his strength made perfect in our weakness. In consequence of these blessed declarations, we know that when we are weakest in ourselves, we are strongest in the Lord. The greater our helplessness, and the more numerous and distressing our trials, we require more of the Divine assistance and support. And since God has engaged to supply all our need, and to make his grace sufficient for us; we may then rely on more rich and ample communications of strength and comfort.

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And when you know that your life does not consist in temporal abundance, but in the presence and friendship of the Most High; when you know that his favour is life, and his loving-kindness better than life, and that these are most amply afforded in seasons of suffering and sorrow; will you shrink from the cross, which is loaded with these invaluable blessings? or tremble to place your feet in those waters of affliction, which are wafting to you your best and dearest treasures? Cultivate another and a better spirit; and learn to say with the apostle, "Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me: therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong."

7. Affliction procures us the most frequent and refreshing visits of the Spirit of God.

A parent may love all his family, and treat the whole with tenderness: but if there is any who engrosses more of his attention, and receives more marked proofs of his care than another, it is the one who is most feeble, delicate, and sickly. And though the Lord Jesus Christ has charge of all his people, and loves the whole with the most lively affection; the visits of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit, are most plentifully imparted to those who are subjected to the most painful and lingering trial. He feeds his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs with his arm, carries them in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young. His own gracious declaration is, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flames kindle upon thee." Accordingly, the valley of Achor has often proved the door of hope. At evening time it has been light. His people have been not only patient, but joyful in tribulation. They have glorified him in the fires. They have found that when their outer man decayed, their inner man was renewed. When poor in this world's goods, they have had all, and abounded; and been able calmly

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and confidently to say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Sickness, suffering, and death itself surely may be cheerfully undergone, if, with the spouse, we can say, "His right hand is under my head, and his left hand doth embrace me."

8. Affliction prepares us for greater measures of future glory.

Though in heaven all are happy and glorious, they possess very different degrees of honour and of joy. For one star differeth from another star in glory: and so also is the resurrection of the dead. The degrees of glory in general, are conferred according to the diligence and devotedness displayed in the service of God. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many unto righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." But there are cases in which the rewards of that better world, are proportioned to the sacrifices which have been made, and the faith and fortitude with which sufferings have been sustained for the Saviour's sake. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory." And shall the student patiently bear all the fatigues of literary toil, and the soldier all the privations and perils of the campaign, for a little fading worldly renown? And shall you shrink from the pressure of those temporary and short-lived sufferings, when you have nothing less in view than the fulness of celestial felicity, and all the triumphs of eternal joy?

Are these things so? Is it true that affliction is a powerful preservative from sin; that it shuts the heart up to the faith, and preserves us from wandering from the God of love? that it unfolds the meaning, and displays the excellence of the promises? that it enhances the value of our spiritual mercies, and makes us more sensible of the importance of an interest in the provisions of the everlasting covenant? that it gives life and fervour to prayer?

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that it brings more plentiful supplies of spiritual strength and consolation? that it affords us the most frequent and refreshing visits of the Spirit of God? and works out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory? Then under all your trials learn resignation to the appointments of your heavenly Father. Be patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Inquire into the lessons of humility, self-denial, submission to the Divine will, and diligence and zeal in duty, which your troubles are intended to enforce. Say unto God, "Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." And until you discover the lessons that they are intended to inculcate, in patience possess your souls. Under the guidance and direction of the God of love, all things are working together for your good. Your severest trials are sent in mercy; and will yield you the peaceable fruits of righteousness. What you know not now you shall know hereafter. In the meantime you know enough to convince you that they come from a friend, are the effects of his love, and intended for your profit. Will the patient submit to the treatment which gives a temporary increase to his sufferings, when he knows that it will ultimately remove his complaint, and restore him to health and soundness? Will the mariner calmly endure the violence of a storm, when he knows that it is carrying him from a pursuing rancorous foe, and bringing him more speedily into a safe and friendly port? And yet will you tremble or despond under your trials, which are raising you above a world that would undo you, and fitting you more rapidly and fully for the purity and peace of heaven?

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

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CHAPTER XII.

ON DISTRESS ARISING FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH.

"Do flesh and nature dread to die?
And timorous thoughts our minds enslave?
Yet grace can raise our hopes on high,
And quell the terrors of the grave!"

On contemplating death and the glory beyond it, many Christians act a most unreasonable and inconsistent part, and do the grossest injustice to our Divine and adorable Redeemer. They feel that this world is not their rest. They are harassed with the trials and calamities of life They find that their sanctification is far from being com plete, and their spiritual enjoyments pure and perfect. They profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ; to delight in his society; to long for complete conformity to his image; to mourn his absence; and to be desirous to see him as he is, and to possess close and uninterrupted communion with him.

But though death will put an end to all their sufferings and sorrows, place them in the immediate presence of their Lord, and the full enjoyment of his glory; they eagerly cling to life, and deprecate the thoughts of dying. They tremble at the approach of Christ, and dwell with reluctance and regret on the prospect of being presented before him. They are terrified lest the bustle and business of life should be interrupted by the signals of his descent, and they should be transported too speedily into his kingdom and joy. And when the summons of death is actually put into their hands, they instinctively recoil

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from its sight, and pathetically exclaim, Spare us, O Lord, that we may recover strength, before we go hence, and be no more.

But, my dear Christian friends, ought this to be the case? If you have laid up your treasure in heaven; if you have fixed your affections on the things that are above; if you are living by faith on the Son of man; and making him all your salvation and all your desire; what is there which ought to inspire a dread of dissolution, rivet your attachment to the things of earth and time, or excite alarm at the view of coming and appearing before your God?

To a man of the world, who has lived without God, who has his portion here, whose affections grovel in the dust, whose soul is a stranger to the sublime delights and elevating employments of religion; life must be possessed of inexpressible charms, and death of inconceivable overwhelming terror. He has no acquaintance with God, nor any inheritance in heaven. However gaily and merrily he may trip along this world's brief journey, he is hastening to woe unutterable. He is running upon the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler, and rushing to endless ruin. Careless and unconscious as he is of his situation, it is one of unmeasurable wretchedness. Of all the awful spectacles which we are called to witness, none is so agonizing and insupportable, as to stand by the death-bed of a fellow-immortal, who has frittered away the short, but invaluable day of his visitation. The ravages of earthquakes, the devastations of volcanoes, and the flames of a burning universe, shrink into insignificance before the misery of the man, who dies after having passed his life in disregarding the precious entreaties of mercy, and resisting the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost. His breath departs: and in that moment the delusive vision of his bliss for ever vanishes. Confronted with that God whom he has forgotten, and that Judge whom he has despised, and insulted; he is banished from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power, into the accumulated horrors of that eternity, for which he made no preparation, and which by his carelessness and crimes he has

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armed with wrath and filled with anguish. Who knows the power of the Almighty's anger? Who can conceive the dreadfulness of being turned into hell, and subjected to its never-ending weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth?

Men who are living without the power of godliness, have infinite cause to deprecate appearing before the Son of God, and to cling tenaciously to that world which contains their all. But if you are resting your hopes on the atonement, delighting in Jesus after the inward man; if you are imploring conformity to his image, and longing for the full enjoyment of God: why should you desire to lengthen out the period of your exile and bondage? recoil from the approach of death? or dread to enter the rest and joy of your Lord? Is there any thing repulsive in the person, or formidable in the presence of the Immanuel? Is there any thing terrible or appalling in the passage from earth to heaven? Is there any thing fascinating in the world to excite your admiration, and rivet your affections?

Since you cleave to life and recoil from the thoughts of dying, will you say that,

I. There is any thing repulsive in the person, or formidable in the presence of Him before whom death places you?

Death introduces you into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And is he an enemy or a stranger? one who has treated you with haughtiness and severity? grieved you by his coldness and unkindness? or exhausted and oppressed you by his tasks and his rigour?

He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person: the Creator and preserver of all: of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. Who filled the earth with its riches, and garnished the heavens with their beauty? Who brought you into being? watched over your infant years? guided you in the intricate and dangerous paths of youth? furnished your table? anointed your head with oil? made your cup to run over? and followed you with goodness and mercy

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at every step of your pilgrimage? To these, and a thousand similar questions, the same reply must be returned: It was the Lord. It was he who arrested you in the midst of your career of carelessness and carnality; disclosed the plagues of your heart; stripped you of your refuges of lies; led you to the cross; proclaimed peace to your troubled mind, and gave you good hope through grace of salvation with eternal glory. When the world frowned on you; when friends forsook you; and the worthless cast out your name as evil; he was the friend who stuck closer than a brother, and amidst the most terrific threatenings with which you were assailed, cheered and encouraged you on by the kind assurance, Well done, good and faithful servant, be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life. When languor and sickness prevailed; when awe-struck relatives stood weeping around you; when the physician shook his head, and silently withdrew; when your heart fainted, and your flesh failed; it was he who stood by you, sustained your drooping spirits, raised you from the bed of distress and danger, and sent you back to the duties and enjoyments of your calling. When bewildered with fears, and beset with difficulties and perils; it was he who opened to you the Scriptures, led you to the throne of grace, filled your mouth with arguments, made you joyful in the house of prayer, conducted you to the communion table, and spread over you the banner of safety and of love. When deep was calling unto deep, when waves and billows were passing over you; it was he who darted through the gloom, and in the soothing accents of love, saying, Be not afraid, it is I, stilled the tumult of your mind, and shed light like a sun through your soul.

And has Jesus fed and upheld you through the whole of your pilgrimage? has he freely given you all the comforts which you have tasted, and all the hopes which you entertain; has he loved you and given himself for you? Has he for you lighted up the splendours of heaven, and crowded it with all its sources of light and ecstacy? And yet shall you be averse to meet him, and afraid to go to him? Does he who came to seek and to save that which

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was lost; he who became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich; he who poured out his soul unto death, that you might live an eternity in bliss: does he engage to come, and receive you to himself? And yet will you protest against his appearing, and entreat him to delay his promised descent? Do we delight in the society of an exalted friend and generous benefactor; rejoice to be recognised as his associates, and honoured to wait on him, and receive his visits in return? And when the glory and the grace of the Lord Jesus, so infinitely surpass all earthly kindness and all created comprehension; will you shun his presence, and flee from his approach? Are you his disciples? are you living on him by faith; walking with God; preferring him to your chief joy; and in the ordinances of religion and exercises of devotion, seeking communion with him; and crying, When shall we come and appear before him? And yet will you dread his return, who comes to finish your conflicts, admit you into his presence, and make you exceedingly and eternally glad in the light of his countenance and the joys of his salvation?

And if his presence is desirable and delightful, is there any thing,

II. Terrible and appalling in the circumstances connected with the passage from earth to heaven?

To many this is the trying, discouraging circumstance. They would like to see Jesus as he is, and gladly come and appear before God: but they are afraid of what must accompany their departure from time into eternity. Canaan could be entered only by crossing the Jordan. Heaven cannot be reached but by the dark valley and shadow of death. And this possesses much to alarm and agitate.

One is afraid to die on account of the consequences of death.

"After death cometh the judgment, when each must give an account of himself unto God, and have his condition decided for ever according to what he has done in the body. But how can I stand before the God of all the

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earth? Without holiness no man can see him. But alas! I am a sinful man. Iniquities prevail against me. I have not attained, neither am I already perfect. My heart, notwithstanding all its partiality and desire to justify me, condemns me for many duties neglected, and many mercies abused. How much more must God condemn me, who is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things? And if Jesus disown me, what must be my fate? To whom then can I flee for help, or where can I leave my glory? If heaven close its gates against me, endless misery must be my portion. And if the soul is lost, all is gone: for what shall it profit me to gain the whole world, and lose my own soul? or what can I give in exchange for my soul? Who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can lie down with everlasting burnings?"

Another is afraid to enter the dark valley and shadow of death, on account of the painful and affecting circumstances with which dissolution is attended.

"My spirits fail, and my heart sinks, when I reflect on the groans and agonies of dying; the wasting sickness, the burning fever, the racking pain, the exhausting languor, restlessness and fainting, that beset the avenues of death; and all the humbling and revolting consequences that follow dissolution; the coffin and the shroud, the damp grave and the nauseous worm, the decay and corruption which shall devour this flesh, and render it a mass of putrefaction and loathsomeness."

Another is reluctant to die because of the long and melancholy separation which it will create betwixt him and his family and friends.

"The faith and affection of the people of God have raised them in my esteem, and endeared them to my heart. My own family are never absent from my thoughts; and, by a thousand tender, though nameless ties, are firmly bound to my soul. But from them all death removes me, and renders me as ignorant of their condition, and as incapable, as the stones of the field, of ministering either to their comfort or improvement. And after all the happiness that I have experienced in their society, how can I endure to break up so many sacred and strong attach-

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ments? bear to see the companion of my joys and sorrow; and the little objects of my love, weeping around me? support the agony of their parting embrace? or sustain the burst of sorrow that will follow my last farewell?

"Ever since I knew the grace of God, my fervent desire and ceaseless endeavour have been that they might be saved. But after all my labours and prayers, there are some whose condition is worse than doubtful; but without evidence that they are brought under the power of godliness, how can I leave them in this wicked and ensnaring world, where I myself have suffered so severely; and where, if I had not been upheld by the mighty power of God, I must have made shipwreck of the faith, and have sunk into everlasting perdition? If even under my own eye, they have repeatedly wandered from the way of life; what shall become of their souls, when I am gone, and can watch over, and admonish, them no more?"

Another is pained at the thoughts of dying from an apprehension of the loss which his death will occasion to the interests of religion and of righteousness.

"I have long been embarked in a pious and beneficent enterprise. After years of toil and anxiety have been spent upon the undertaking, much is still wanting to bring it to a close. When my breath departs, my purposes will be broken off, and all my efforts will be blasted. The enemies of light will rejoice in my decease, and speedily overspread the land around with vice and darkness. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in, not sparing the flock."

It cannot be denied that there is much in death to alarm and agitate the mind. But if you are really relying on Christ alone for salvation, if you are preferring him to your chief joy, ashamed and humbled because you love him no more ardently, and resemble him no more closely; whatever may be the ground of your trepidation or terror, look to him, and there you will find enough to meet and remove it all.

Does a sense of guilt and imperfection deter you?

Guilt is fearful and tremendous indeed. All unrighteousness is sin: and the wages of sin is death. To ven-

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ture into eternity with unpardoned guilt, is as much as your soul is worth. This is to throw yourselves upon certain destruction. The foundation on which we may safely place our hopes of acceptance before a God glorious in holiness, and which is able to sustain the whole weight of our everlasting interests, requires nothing less than Almighty strength.

Such a foundation, however, is to be obtained in the atonement of Immanuel: and if you will only have recourse to it and rest on it, you shall immediately secure safety and peace. Your guilt may be great and dreadful: but his blood cleanseth from all sin. Your persons may be vile and unworthy: but in him there is everlasting righteousness, and he can render you comely through his comeliness put upon you. You may be weak and helpless, and your interests may be of the most mighty and commanding importance: but his arm is omnipotent, and he is able to save to the uttermost. Though you were from this day down to the consummation of all things to keep toiling in the yoke of repentance and reformation, you never could have redemption but through his blood: and if you will go to him instantly, all its pardoning, sanctifying, and saving virtue, will from this moment become your own. It will this instant justify you freely, and sanctify you wholly. Our right to heaven and our meetness for its honour and enjoyments, depend neither upon the manner in which we are brought to him, nor the time spent in his service, but upon the reality of our faith in him, and the sincerity of the heart's submission to him. On one and the same day, the penitent thief heard of Jesus for the first time, believed on him, and accompanied him to paradise. Believe on him, and you also shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

Are you afraid of the pain and agony of dying, and ready to recoil from the darkness, the dreariness, and ravages of the grave?

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on him shall never die, but have life everlasting. He who has guided and guarded you through the whole of your journey, will not cast you off when death and the grave

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overtake you. In the dark, the fears of the infant are visionary. In its mother's arms, it is then just as safe as in the light. And if you have fled to the Lord Jesus, and entrusted into his hands your souls and all their interests, you are just as safe in the darkest and deepest of the swellings of Jordan, as if placed within the gates of the celestial Zion, or seated on the throne of glory. If he be for you, who can be against you? The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He himself declares, "Fear not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. I will redeem thee from death, I will ransom thee from the power of the grave. O death, I will be thy plague: O grave, I will be thy destruction."

And why take you thought for the body? What is sown in weakness, shall be raised in power; and, refined and purified by its long sleep in the dust of the earth, shall be raised in beauty and honour, and fashioned like unto the glorious body of your Lord.

Are you afraid to leave your friends and families in this wicked and ensnaring world, where every step is beset with danger, and where such multitudes involve themselves in everlasting misery?

Remember that that God, who is over all, is rich unto all. His promise is to you, and to your children. Without his guidance and blessing, even with your presence and watchfulness, they would be eternally undone: and without your presence and counsels, with his guidance and blessing, they are safe. He who commands you to cast your burden on himself, encourages you to cast on him this care also. "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." And can you desire a more powerful protector? a more skilful guide, or more generous benefactor?

Are you embarked in a pious and benevolent enterprise, to complete which years will yet be requisite?

It is your duty to plead and wrestle for the welfare and salvation of all, and to be continually engaged in works

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of faith and labours of love. The success however of religion does not depend upon your life nor your exertions, but upon the blessing of the Most High. Before you received your existence, he had a church and a people; and ages after your bones are reduced to dust, his cause and interest shall remain unimpaired. He shall have a seed to serve him throughout all generations. His name shall endure forever. The whole earth shall see his salvation, and be filled with his glory.

And since there is nothing repulsive in the person, nor formidable in the presence of the Lord Jesus; and since there is nothing appalling nor alarming in the passage from earth to heaven, will you maintain,

III. That there is any thing fascinating in the world to excite your admiration and rivet your affections to the things of earth and time?

The world is polluted by vice and darkened by suffering and sorrow. The name of God is blasphemed, and his laws and authority violated and contemned. His grace and goodness are dispised and abused, and his spirit grieved and insulted. Satan walks at large, and goeth about incessantly, seeking whom he may devour. His servants have the ascendency: for the world lies in wickedness. Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat.

War and discord harass the states and lay waste the nations. Weakness, inconsistency, and offences, break out in congregations, and perplex and agitate the churches. Disease and death enter our habitations, and create melancholy havock in our families and the hallowed circle of our friends. The body is wasted with pining illness, and the mind is the frequent victim of remorse and fear, of alarm and terror. We cannot do the things that we would. We cannot tell how oft we transgress. We are perpetually dishonouring God by our waywardness and unworthiness, and afflicting our souls by our formality and coldness.

And is this a world which should attract our admira-

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tion and fascinate our hearts? Is it an object of desire to prolong our residence in a world that languisheth and mourneth, where the whole creation travaileth and groaneth in pain together? Would you like a little longer to be plied by the temptations of Satan, and urged by the snares and allurements of sin? to hear the blessed name of God blasphemed, and see the spirit of all grace more contumeliously dishonored and more insultingly provoked? Would you like to have your souls a little longer vexed from day to day with the filthy conversation of the wicked, and witness more of their impious and daring outrages against the King of kings? Have you suffered so many things to no purpose, that you would like a little longer to have your bodies shaken with disease and racked with torturing pain? to have your eyes reddened with tears, and your heart wrung with anguish for the sins that beset you, and the lusts that war against your soul? to dishonour your Saviour, and offend your God? to drink the cup of sorrow, and bathe in the waters of affliction?

And if there is nothing either in the natural or moral world which should attract you to earth; will you say that your affections ought to be bound to life, in consequence of your religious privileges and spiritual enjoyments?

It is true indeed that Jesus has done much for us on earth. Unable to restrain the exercise of his loving-kindness till we reach the heaven of heavens, and see him as he is; he commences just now the endless, endearing career of his generosity and grace. He showers down his goodness upon us in the house of our pilgrimage. He forgives us all our iniquities: he renews us in the spirit of our minds: introduces us into his family: dignifies us with the name, and blesses us with a place amongst his own sons and daughters. He sheds abroad his love in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and admits us to fellowship with himself. He overrules every event for our advantage, and makes goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. He blesses us with the first-fruits of the Spirit; and solaces us, in this land of distance and

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darkness, with a specimen and earnest of our future felicity and everlasting glory.

Loaded with his gifts and enriched with his munificence, we are frequently compelled to stand still and admire his liberality and love, and cry, What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? The Lord is the portion of our inheritance and of our cup. The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage.

But after all, we must remember that these privileges and enjoyments are neither the productions of the earth, nor the whole of our spiritual portion.

They are not the productions of the earth. They are sent down from above. They come from the Father of lights and God of love. They are sent in mercy to animate and strengthen us amidst the toils and perils of our warfare, by affording us a security and foretaste of the honour and joy awaiting us, when the labours and conflicts of mortality are closed. We know what springs from earth. It is groaning under a curse. But while sterile in all that is spiritual and profitable, it is fertile in thorns and thistles, in all that can annoy and injure. Without the perpetual superintendence and care of the Most High, it would soon stifle and destroy all these plants of heavenly growth. In a soil and climate so ungenial and noxious, nothing less than Divine power can maintain the existence, and preserve the beauty and vigour of these sacred principles, which constitute the delight and joy of a renewed soul, and afford an earnest and representation of celestial bliss.

And whilst the best and dearest of all our present possessions come from above; we must also remember that they are far inferior to our future and eternal inheritance, and furnish us with a faint and imperfect idea of the great things which God has prepared in a better world for them that love him.

Vast and invaluable as the blessings are which we now enjoy, redemption is not confined to them. Can we believe that the riches of saving mercy are exhausted in the religious privileges and spiritual delights which we expe

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rience in the course of our threescore and ten? Was the mighty and liberal heart of Immanuel set upon nothing nobler nor higher, than the partial knowledge, the defective holiness, and the limited happiness which in this life we are enabled to acquire? Was it merely for this that the councils of heaven were engaged from everlasting in deep and intense deliberation? that the patriarchal dispensation was planned, and the Mosaic economy introduced? Was it for no more than this that every promise of revelation was charged with blessings, and the hopes and prayers of an expecting church were kept for ages rivetted on the mission of Messiah? Was it for no more than this that the stupendous machinery in providence and grace, since the day that the sun first set on a fallen world, has been maintained in constant vigorous operation? and the Eternal Spirit, in all his sanctifying and renovating energy, has been hourly, perpetually at work in enlightening and purifying the souls of those who are partakers of the great salvation? Was it for no more than this that the heavens at last gave way; and the Son of God, in all the fulness of Divine beneficence and power, descended to the globe we dwell on; and for thirty-three years, in all the depth of suffering and sorrow, traversed this world of crime and woe? watered the mountains with his tears? broke the silence of creation with his midnight cries? ascended the cross, and poured out his soul in the midst of agony and blood?

The Lord is a God of knowledge. Throughout the whole range of his works and dispensations, consummate, absolute wisdom reigns? and in each he has an end in view, suited to the importance and magnitude of the instruments which he uses. And are we to suppose that redemption, which in the majesty and grandeur of the means employed, so infinitely surpasses all the productions of his power, is an exception to this general rule? and that the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, in treading the winepress of almighty vengeance and in laying down his life, had not an object to gain, proportioned to the immense price

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which he paid, and the mysterious and matchless measures which he adopted to secure it?

He well knew the nature of the undertaking in which he was embarked. Before he entered on the ardent task, he had a joy set before him, for which he reckoned it well worth while to endure the cross: and he did not leave the scene of his toils and his anguish without the assurance that he should see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

A salvation, however, capable of rewarding the sufferings and death of the Son of God, is far too large for this contracted life and the little world we live in. The resources of a prince may be great: but a prison is utterly unfit for his residence, or the display of his majesty and munificence. The water of the ocean is immense: but it is only a little that a cistern can contain. And with the universe at his command, and all the resources of Omnipotence at his disposal; yet, when he pours his blessings into our contracted souls, and conveys them through the medium of his word and ordinances, it is only a small portion of his generosity which the Lord Jesus can unfold, and a mere specimen of his goodness and grace that we can enjoy. Though his power, at this moment, is as great as it shall be after the consummation of all things; still this world is too narrow, time is too short, and our capacities too limited and feeble, to allow us in the present state to receive the whole fruits of his purchase, to admit the unreserved communications of his liberality and love, and to be filled and feasted with all his fulness.

In order, therefore, to complete our holiness and happiness, and do justice to the designs of his peerless benignity and mercy, it is necessary that a new system should succeed the present, and eternity close in upon the transactions of time. A new heaven and a new earth are prepared to supply the place of the old, where all our faculties and powers shall arrive at full maturity and vig our; and where the Saviour, who loved us, shall have ample room and leisure to perfect all his purposes of kindness and munificence, and raise us to the height of dignity, and put us in full possession of unbounded blessedness. Accordingly, while providing richly for our safety

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and comfort in the place of our present abode, his own heart rested on the bliss and glory of heaven; and thither he taught us to direct our own expectations and desires. "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there also shall my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." And his last petition in his last prayer was, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

If you reflect for a little on your state in heaven, in contrast with your condition here, you will soon discover the kindness and wisdom of your Redeemer in his dying request, and acquiesce with the apostle in his declaration, that "to depart, and be with Christ, is far better."

Ever since you knew the grace of Christ in truth, your heart's desire and prayer have been to be near him, to see him as he is, and be like him. In searching the Scriptures, in attending on his ordinances, in pouring out your souls before him; the leading, the supreme object of your ambition, has been to see him more clearly, and enjoy him more fully. But are you able in this world to secure the objects on which your hearts are so immovably fixed, and which you so eagerly court? Do you see the Saviour whom you love? Are you like him whom you admire and adore? Are you enriched with the treasures of his grace, and filled with all his fulness?

There are days and weeks, when you cannot get near him, and know not where to find him. You go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but you cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but you cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that you cannot see him. You complain that you are cast out from his presence, and that he is a God that hideth himself.

But in heaven you shall see him, and see him as he is. The psalmist exulted in the assurance that he should behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied when he awoke with his likeness. "Blessed," said our Saviour, "are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." We are repeatedly informed that his servants shall see his face,

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behold his glory, and walk with him in white. In his description of the new Jerusalem, St. John tells us, that the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Into this glory believers are admitted the moment after death. The Bible knows nothing at all of the cold and repulsive doctrine of the sleep of the soul, during the interval betwixt death and the resurrection of the dead. It represents the transition from earth to heaven as instantaneous: for it speaks of our presence with the Lord as the immediate consequence of our absence from the body. "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." "To-day," said our dying Redeemer to the penitent suffering beside him, "shalt thou be with me in paradise." And as, on quitting their clay tabernacles, believers go to him, there they remain till his return. "For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." There sleep is unnecessary and unknown. For they rest not day nor night in celebrating his praises. They sit with him upon his throne, and follow him whithersoever he goeth.

From your immediate presence with Christ, and your unclouded view of his glory, there will result the most delightful enlargement of your intellectual faculties, and the noblest accessions to your knowledge. You are already blessed with some degree of the knowledge of God. Truths of which you formerly were ignorant, and which still remain concealed from the wise and prudent, have been disclosed to your contemplation. The gross darkness is already past, and the true light now shineth.

But after all, you see only through a glass darkly. The thick and massy substance of matter is interposed betwixt you and the subjects which you are most anxious to comprehend. God is invisible. The celestial guards, by whom you are attended and protected, are beyond the reach of your observation. Many of the pages of inspiration are only partially understood. The universe is wide: but from the place of our present residence, it is

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only a mere corner of the Divine dominions that we behold. Obscurity rests on many of the dispensations of Providence: and amidst the overpowering glories of the gospel, our minds are often lost before the splendour of those objects, by which the angels' eyes are dazzled.

But when we are absent from the body and present with the Lord, every obstruction to our intellectual improvement shall be removed. Every remain of ignorance, imperfection, and error shall vanish. All our doubts and difficulties shall be dissolved. The rays of Divine illumination, shall be poured upon the darkest and most perplexing matters of present investigation; and our faculties, brought to full maturity and vigour, shall be fitted for mastering the most sublime and magnificent realities, and strengthened for the direct and immediate vision of God.

And if in this world, where our faculties are so feeble, where we labour under so many disadvantages for spiritual improvement, we have in a few years reached our present attainments; in the course of eternal ages, what a mental vigour shall we acquire, and what an amount of intelligence shall we gain, when we shall see him as he is, behold light in his light, and know even as we are known?

This vision of his face will complete your sanctification.

Your obligations to his grace are already unspeakable. He has not only forgiven you your trespasses, but also subdued your iniquities. He has shed abroad his love in your hearts by the Holy Ghost. He has led you to seek the things which are above, to love him supremely, to delight in his law after the inward man, and labour to perfect holiness in his fear. He has renewed you in the spirit of your minds, and created you again unto good works.

After all, however, your sanctification is far from being complete. You cannot give to God the glory due unto his name. You cannot love him as you would, nor serve him as you ought. You are still beset with sin, and burdened with a body of death.

But the spirits of the just are made perfect. And when

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we are present with the Lord, every weakness shall be repaired, every want shall be supplied, all that is pure shall become perfect, and all that is spiritual and holy shall be rendered permanent. We shall not only love God with our whole heart, but also serve him with all our strength and mind, and be possessed alike of the will and the power to fulfil his adorable pleasure. The moral disorders of our nature being eradicated, and all our principles and faculties improved and elevated, the whole energies of our minds shall be in entire and eternal subjection to the dictates of our enlightened understanding, and execute with alacrity and correctness all the injunctions of our renovated and perfected wills. We shall be alike incapable of wandering from our duty, and of languishing in our work. Our invigorated powers through an endless succession of ages shall continue on the full stretch: and so far from experiencing weariness or fatigue, shall gather fresh energy and ardour from the exercise. We shall go from strength to strength, increase our joy in the Lord, and perpetually reflect more of the image of our Divine and adorable Redeemer. In consequence of the sight which Moses obtained of the glory of the Lord, his face shone, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold it: and the communion which Stephen enjoyed with his Master, not only filled his soul with serenity and joy, but also beamed through his countenance, and forced itself upon the notice of his barbarous and relentless persecutors. But they had only a distant and transient view of God, a faint and indistinct representation of his excellencies. What then must be the effect, when we shall see him, not darkly and at a distance; not with these dim organs of vision, but clearly, closely, fully, and with strong immortal eyes? As the sun no sooner ascends the horizon, than instantly the whole space lying beneath him is illuminated with his rays, and converted into a region of light; so the Sun of righteousness will no sooner rise in all his uncreated majesty upon the paradise of God, than instantly the whole will be lighted into splendour with his radiance, and all its happy inhabitants made to shine with his lustre, and reflect the brightness of his effulgence.

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"The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Beholding with open face his glory, we shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory."

From all this there will flow a joy and happiness inconceivable, boundless and inexhaustible.

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Every grievance shall be redressed: every pain and sorrow shall flee away; and every dignity and delight shall be conferred, which a God of love can bestow, or our limited but enlarged capacities can receive. We shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house, and he will make us drink of the river of his pleasure. We shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat: for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed us, and lead us unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. We shall enter into the joy of our Lord, inherit all things, and be for ever filled with his fulness.

Is this the end of your faith? Are these the blessed fruits of your religious labours and expectations? the glorious results of living by faith and dying in the Lord? Why then should you shrink from the approach of death, and eagerly and timidly cling to life? The men of the world, who have lived to themselves, and by their carelessness, and crimes, have treasured up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath; may tenaciously cleave to that world which contains their little all, and deprecate the advance of the king of terrors, who comes to drag them to the bar of an offended God, and plunge them into the horrors of a ruined eternity. But, O why should you, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope that is set before you; you, who have your treasure in heaven, and your conversation there; why should you recoil from the appearance of death, and dread that hour which sets you free from all the sins and sufferings of mortality, and puts you in full possession of the love and salvation of the

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Lord? Does the captive exile fear to be loosed, and restored to the bosom of his family, and the society of his friends? Does the bride deprecate the day of her espousals and of the gladness of her heart? Does the heir mourn because he has reached the time appointed of his father, for passing from under the restraints of tutors and governors, and for taking the complete possession of his titles and estate? Does the son of a king, who has been long retained in the hands of his enemies, and doomed to bear their insult and scorn, their outrage and cruelty; regret the arrival of the day which is to release him from their galling insolence and tyranny, and send him back to the arms of his father, and the palace of his ancestors?

And complaining that you are condemned to darkness and sorrow, to a state of restriction and bondage; will you mourn the dawn of that day, which shall throw down the walls of your prison, deliver you from the body of this death, and introduce you into the glorious liberty of the sons of God? Is Jesus the beloved of your souls, all your salvation and all your desire? And yet will you repine because the day of his marriage is come, when your union to him shall be complete, and your joy shall be full? Are you at present only in the infancy of your being, where all your powers are imperfect, and your comforts mixed with trouble and sorrow? And yet will you lament that you are to reach the stature of perfect men in Christ, and be put in complete possession of the purchased inheritance? Professing to be pilgrims and strangers upon earth; bewailing that you are obliged to dwell in Mesech and sojourn in the tents of Kedar; crying, O that we had the wings of a dove, then would we fly away and be at rest; will you grieve at the call which commands you to arise and depart, to return to the house of your Father, and become kings and priests unto God and the Lamb? Do you love communion with Jesus; delight in the knowledge of his glory; long for conformity to his image, and the enjoyment of his presence and favour? And yet will you betray alarm at the prospect of the consummation and crown of dignity and bliss, in being placed in his

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immediate presence, and seated with him upon his throne?

You know well what a mighty loss our souls sustained by the fall of Adam. Would you like to have the effects of our apostasy repaired? Would you rejoice to be restored to paradise? If its beauty and fertility were again to be made to spring up, and the cherubim of glory to be withdrawn from its gates; would you gladly bend your steps to Eden, and eagerly enter its green and flowery arbours? Would you impatiently seek there a retreat from the stormy wind and tempest? from the blasphemies of the profane, and the filth and nauseousness of the impure? from the clamours of contention, the outrages of violence and oppression? from the languors of disease, and the ravages of death? Would you exult there to regain the image and favour of your Creator and Lord, and wait in patience till the God of love should call you up from its sacred joys and ennobling employments to the scenes and services of the world of glory?

With such a prospect before you, would you grudge no toil, and decline no danger to reach its pure and inviting shelter; but resolutely and perseveringly urge your unwearied way to its blissful abodes, though continents should stretch their breadth, mountains raise their awful forms, and oceans roll their raging billows between?

And in the arms of Immanuel, in the bosom of your Saviour and your God; have you all this and more? Have you there a refuge from every storm, and a defence from every foe? Have you there exemption from every toil and trial, and deliverance from every grief and fear? Do the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary live in unbroken rest? Shall no lion be there, neither any ravenous beast go up thereon? Shall it not once be found there? Shall the inhabitant never say, I am sick? Are the people all righteous? Shall your sun no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself? Shall the Lord be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning be ended? And while freed from every evil, shall you be invested with every blessing? Shall you see, and be

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like your God? and be feasted with the goodness of his house, and made exceeding glad in the light of his countenance?

Is all this, and more, awaiting you in the heaven of heavens? And yet will you still desire to linger on in this world of tears and trials, and deprecate the thoughts of dying? O learn to cultivate the spirit of the children of Zion; and when you hear Jesus saying, Surely I come quickly; instead of entreating a longer delay of his coming, invite his descent, welcome his advent, and demonstrate your joy at his approach, by cordially replying, "Amen, even so come Lord Jesus. The voice of my Beloved lo, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. Now is come salvation, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ. Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him: we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation."

"To Jesus, the crown of my hope,
My soul is in haste to be gone;
O bear me, ye cherubim, up,
And waft me away to his throne."

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CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE EVIDENCES OF A STATE OF GRACE.

"In prayer my soul drew near the Lord,
And saw his glory shine;
And when I read his holy word,
I called each promise mine."

We have now seen that to those who apply to Christ, no sin is too great to be forgiven; that as long as any sorrow is felt for iniquity, and any desire entertained for reconciliation to God, no soul can be charged with having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost; but that the universal calls and free offers of the Gospel, are an ample warrant and security to every individual to come to Christ, and believe on him for his own salvation. We have seen that whilst the soul counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, it has no real cause of alarm on account of its want of humiliation and contrition for its past offences; that that faith is sound and saving, which, however weak, shuts the soul up to Christ, endears him to the heart, and leads us to yield ourselves to him entirely and rest on him alone for salvation; that though there can be no faith without a persuasion of the truth of what we believe, many have an interest in Christ without enjoying the assurance of their own salvation; that while remaining corruption is resisted and hated, and, in spite of all its efforts to rule, is prevented from reigning, the soul is safe, and not under the law but under grace. And we have also seen, that whilst the man follows hard after God, and longs for the enjoyment of the Divine favour, however dark and disconso-

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late his condition, he has no cause to apprehend that God has forgotten him; that temporal affliction is a blessing, and instead of being a proof of his displeasure, is a mark of his love; and that death, instead of being a ground of fear, ought to be to a Christian an object of desire, and an occasion of rejoicing.

Many other grounds of spiritual distress might be enumerated: but without entering into any farther detail, I shall close all that has been said by illustrating a general truth, which applies to every case of religious trouble that can occur: While you are possessed of real religion, while you are in a state of grace, whatever you may experience to alarm and agitate you, you have no reason to despair.

If you ask what real religion is, and by what means you may ascertain that you are in a state of grace; I have no hesitation in replying that real religion may be most easily and decisively known,

I. By the soul's resting for acceptance in the sight of God upon the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the only foundation which the Bible recognises, and to which a Christian dare cling.

Every man has some foundation of his own, to which he trusts for acceptance in the day of decision. Some rely on their moral duties, and others on their religious performances; some on their good works, and others on their good intentions. The grounds of their confidence differ as widely as the education which they have received, the society which they frequent, and the habits which they have formed. But still, however shallow and deceitful, however rotten and ruinous, some ground of confidence they must have, otherwise they could not retain their peace of conscience, nor remain in what is commonly, though in their case falsely, called their right mind. A view of the magnitude of the horrors awaiting the unregenerate in the future world, is more than any soul could endure, and if they only saw the extent of their everlasting wretchedness, without discovering at the same time the means of escape which the

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Gospel has provided for the perishing, the most stout-hearted and hardened in all the ranks of profligacy and impiety would be driven to distraction.

But a real Christian goes beyond all these, and every other refuge of lies, and never stops till he reaches the foundation laid in Zion. This foundation is impregnable. The righteousness of Christ is possessed of infinite value; and more than this no soul can require for its acceptance before the Lord. It may be no easy matter to bring a believer to confide in it simply and unreservedly. Without a conviction of guilt and a discovery of the destruction which it entails, no man will betake himself to the hope set before him in the Gospel. For they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But awakening and conviction, alarm and terror, remorse and contrition, and all the solicitude and trepidation of the most deep and painful work of the law through which a soul ever passed, can neither recommend him to the Redeemer, nor contribute the smallest fraction to his justification. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work."

But whilst he wants no more than the righteousness of Immanuel, the believer finds that, infinite as it is, the whole is necessary. His guilt is so great, that nothing less than blood Divine can wash it out. His transgressions are so numerous and enormous, that nothing less than Almighty grace can forgive them. His unworthiness is so dreadful, and his heart so desperately wicked; that with a Holy God above him, an infallible tribunal before him, the curse of a broken law pursuing him, and an awful eternity rapidly rushing on; this infinite righteousness is no more than he requires. There is none of it that he can spare. His poor perishing soul needs it all; and he would not for the wealth of ten thousand worlds, nor all the treasures of creation, enter the world of spirits,

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and appear before a holy and heart-searching God, with less than a Divine and all-sufficient righteousness. He can cordially adopt the language of the Apostle, and say, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This entire reliance of the heart, for acceptance in the sight of God, upon the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, constitutes the turning point in religion. Compared with this, every thing shrinks into insignificance. The misery of men in time, and their ruin through eternity, arise from slight and superficial ideas of the sinfulness of sin, and the matchless glorious excellencies of God, which render him incapable of tolerating vice, or conniving at iniquity. Hence, the apathy of the ignorant and illiterate, the infatuated recklessness and utter impenetrability of the gay and frivolous, the shocking impiety and Heaven-daring outrages of the profane and hardened. Were they aware of the consequences of a graceless condition, all the powers of darkness could not impel them to another deed of ungodliness; and rather than abide a moment longer in such an inexpressibly perilous situation, they would submit to be torn limb from limb, and undergo ten thousand violent and dreadful deaths.

But they feel not their guilt: they entertain no apprehension of their awful fate; and therefore, in spite of all that the messengers of the Most High can urge, and all that the plainest declarations of Scripture can denounce, they slumber on, and take their rest; till the brief day of their visitation closes, and in a moment that they think not of, the empty bubble of their visionary bliss gives way, and the tremendous realities of a ruined immortality burst upon their distracted view. Could we look into

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hell, summon the spirits in prison to pass in succession before us, and learn from each how he came into that place of woe; we should find that they all had been undone through blindness of mind and hardness of heart, which led them to neglect the infinite and all-sufficient righteousness of the Redeemer. They would not believe they were so bad as the Bible represented them: but imagined that, though in common with all mankind they had their faults, on the whole they were respectable characters, and possessed many valuable properties. "Oh that we had known that by nature we were the children of disobedience and wrath; that we were dead in trespasses and sins; that we were altogether as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags; that all unrighteousness is sin; that the wages of sin are death; that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin; that there is salvation in no other than the Lord Jesus Christ! Had we understood these things in the land of the living, we should not have come to this place of torment. But the knowledge of them came too late, and now repentance is for ever hidden from our eyes!"

They are irrecoverably lost through their insensibility of soul, which led them to disregard the strongest assurances of Scripture, that other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid already, and that salvation is of grace through faith. And as many as are trusting for their acceptance with God either in whole or in part to their own virtues and performances, are, unconsciously indeed, but rapidly following them to endless perdition. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow. Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore! Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

If moral duties and religious observances, if the tears of penitence and the sighs of contrition, if the reformations induced by reason, or the reparations extorted by the

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terrors of approaching judgment, could wash out the stains of guilt, or open the gates of glory to a single soul, the sorrows and sufferings of the Son of God would have been spared. Calvary never would have been reddened with his blood, nor the grave closed on the Prince of life. And since God has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, this is a demonstration to all that there is salvation in no other; and that, if we would wish to be partakers of the redemption that is in Christ, we must cleave to him simply, rest on him entirely, renounce every thing for his sake, and make him our all in all.

If this is your case, I congratulate you upon your blessed, glorious condition. He that is mighty has done to you great things: and holy is his name. The natural enmity of your mind to him is slain. Your pride, self-sufficiency, carnal ease, and sloth, have received their death blow. The controversy betwixt your soul and God is closed. The conflict for eternity is decided. Grace has won the day, and carried the citadel of your heart: and now little else is before you but an endless triumph. The Lord Jehovah is your strength and your song; he also is become your salvation. Jesus has passed his word, Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. He that believeth shall be saved. And by thus betaking yourselves to him alone for righteousness and strength, you have him for your righteousness and strength, and shall receive all the blessings which infinite merit can secure, and all the safety that the arm of Omnipotence can impart.

But though the first and most decisive, faith in the righteousness of Christ is not the only test of a state of grace. We have not only a Saviour but also a Sanctifier. While by faith in the righteousness of the Redeemer we obtain a title to the kingdom of heaven, through the renovating influences of the Holy Spirit we are afore prepared unto glory, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Though therefore, the foundation of our claim to eternal life is the perfect and all-sufficient righteousness of Immanuel, which is absolutely incapable of

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any additional force or virtue; yet since faith purifies the heart, works by love, and may be as simply and satisfactorily discovered by its results, as the tree by its fruit; our interest in the salvation of the gospel may be very easily ascertained by the effects which faith invariably produces.

We must observe then that real religion may be known,

II. By love to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Unto you who believe he is precious." Without love to him there can be no religion whatever. In redemption he is all in all: and if any man love him not, he is an entire stranger to the gospel, and under the curse of the Most High.*

They who know any thing of him at all, need no commandment to love him. He possesses so many attractions, that their hearts cleave to him, and they cannot withhold from him their fervent affection, and most devout and elevated admiration.

In himself he is infinitely great, and eternally blessed and glorious. The universe is wide. A cannon-ball, discharged from the nearest fixed star, at the moment when God said, Let there be light, though flying with its usual velocity, would still require centuries to reach the earth. But supposing that every inch in that intervening space, that every inch from the centre of the eternal throne round to the farthest verge of immensity, were filled with seraphim and cherubim of the highest and noblest powers; there is worth and excellence in the Lord Jesus Christ to ravish and transport the whole. For he is altogether lovely, the perfection of beauty and of goodness, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, creator and preserver of all: for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: and vast and mighty as the works are which he has made, they afford only a mere specimen of his benevolence and power. In majesty and grandeur, in endearing and peerless loveli-

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

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ness and worth, he sits enthroned immeasurably, ineffably above the brightest and the loftiest of them all.

But whilst in himself he is infinitely great, blessed, and glorious, our obligations to him are innumerable and immense; inconceivably beyond what the language of mortals can utter, or the gift of the whole creation can equal For he loved us, and gave himself for us. He died for our redemption, and rose again for our justification. He died to deliver us from hell, and raise us to heaven; to rescue us from wretchedness unknown and never-ending, and put us in possession of blessedness and honour, unbounded and eternal.

If, therefore, we feel affection, and manifest esteem for the friend who confers a small accession to our fortune, or shews us any tender or costly act of kindness; can we ever have a just sense of the value of the great salvation, without finding our hearts glowing with admiration, and our whole souls penetrated and filled with love and gratitude to our Divine and adorable Redeemer, for blessings so multiplied and overwhelming? blessings which will convert eternity into one uninterrupted scene of joy and ecstacy? blessings purchased with his own toil, and tears, and blood?

To submit to Christianity as a task and a burden, to endure it as a yoke and a bondage, betrays an absolute ignorance of its nature, and a total want of any interest in its elevating and bliss-inspiring spirit. This is to yield to it merely from necessity. This is to declare that in itself it is odious and detestable: but that, bad as it is, it is more tolerable than everlasting perdition.

And are we at liberty to regard in this manner the unspeakable gift of God? Are we permitted thus to contemplate the most matchless display of Divine benignity and mercy, which has spread such transport over creation, and which shall occupy with its praise the joyful lapse of endless ages? Is this all the return that we owe the friend of sinners, the compassionate and generous Saviour of our lost souls, who by the sacrifice of himself has redeemed us from everlasting death, and called us into the hope of his never-ending glory?

Unless we prefer him to our chief joy, delight in him

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after the inner-man, and count all things but loss for his sake; we are destitute of every particle of genuine religion, and have neither part nor lot in its blessings. Real Christians love him in sincerity. Overpowered by the consideration of his unparalleled and astonishing condescension and grace, their habitual inquiry is, "What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits? Bless the Lord, O our soul, and all that is within us, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O our soul, and forget not all his benefits. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Having the hope of soon seeing him as he is, and finding their everlasting all in his presence and favour, in the mean time they cleave to him with full purpose of heart. They love his society; delight in his service; and rejoice to spend and be spent for his sake. They can truly say, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire besides thee."

If this is the case with you, then all is well. If your soul is overcome with the glories of his person and the exceeding riches of his grace; if you are transported with the wonders of his compassion and generosity, and ardently devoted to his interest and honour; and if amidst all the attachment and gratitude that you feel, and all the zeal and energy that you display, you are astonished and humbled because your soul is not melted with still more intense affection, and elevated with still more sublime admiration for Him, whose marvellous loving-kindness, and whose matchless infinite excellencies are sufficient to charm the universe and employ their enraptured adorations for ever and ever: this is a proof that you have passed from death unto life, that you are born from above, and made the heirs of his everlasting kingdom. To the unregenerate he is without form and comeliness. He has no beauty that they should desire him. To love him therefore, to delight in him, and to follow on to know

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him, are the effects of a new nature. This love to his person, and this admiration of his character, prove that God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ; and that you shall partake of that grace, which is promised to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Genuine religion appears,

III. By obedience to the commandments of Christ.

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

Knowing this, and being renewed in the spirit of their minds, the hearts of Christians are strongly and intensely set upon holiness. They are ashamed to grasp at pardon, and neglect purity; to court the favour, and despise the image of God. Sin is the abominable thing which they hate. Its presence fills them with horror. Its commission covers them with confusion, and overwhelms them with consternation and anguish. It bows them down to the dust, and renders them so ashamed and grieved that they are unable to lift up their heads. But they love the law of God. They delight in conformity to his will: they exercise themselves unto godliness: and labour to perfect holiness in his fear. In the retirement of secret devotion, they complain in the bitterness of vexation that iniquities prevail against them, and that they cannot do the things that they would; and implore God to cleanse them from secret faults, to keep them back from all presumptuous sin, and sanctify them wholly in soul, body, and spirit. In attending the ordinances of religion, and frequenting the society of the faithful, the grand object of their ambition is to obtain a closer resemblance to their adorable Redeemer, and a greater meetness for the inher-

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itance of the saints in light. And if you come up to them when engaged in the duties of their calling; you will find that, by setting God before them, doing all in obedience to his will, and endeavouring to keep his love reigning in their hearts, they are striving that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. For the love of Christ constrains them to live not unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.

Others pick and choose amongst the precepts of the Most High, and attend only to the more easy, popular, and fashionable services which are required. But Christians have no limitation nor reserve in their obedience. They receive, observe, and do all things whatsoever he has enjoined. Others confine their regards merely to the outside of religion, and perform only the visible and public duties which he has inculcated. But what believers covet above all things is holiness of heart. They indeed labour to be blameless and harmless, to hold forth the word of life, and abound in the fruits of righteousness. But still the great object of their ambition and pursuit is, to be all glorious within. However amiable and excellent their life may be, their heart is far better. Their life may have its imperfections and its faults: for they cannot do the things that they would. But if they could obtain their hearts' desire and prayer, they would never rest from their labours, nor leave any part of their work unfulfilled. They would comply with every intimation of the will of God, and most effectually promote his praise. They would never read, nor hear, nor pray, without throwing their whole soul into the employment, and entering into the very substance and essence of the exercise in which they were engaged.

The law of God is exceeding broad. But it is no wider than they wish. His law is holy: but that is just the reason why they love it. It enjoins no duty but what they esteem, and delight to discharge. When they hear of the humility, the self-denial, the purity, the spirituality, the elevation of mind, the fervour of spirit, the benevolence to man, and the supreme devotedness to God which it enforces; the first desire that ascends from each of

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their hearts to his throne is, "Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

There is much holiness in heaven. The angels have kept their first estate, and the spirits of the just are made perfect. But is the temperature of heaven too high? Is its devotion too pure? Its fervour too intense? its activity and ardour too strenuous, lofty, and unremitting? Would it gall them to be wholly engaged and engrossed with the interest and honour of God, and to have their time and strength unceasingly and vigorously consecrated to the advancement of his cause and kingdom? Would it grieve them to love him with all the warmth of an angel, and serve him with all the holiness and zeal of a seraph? The holiness of heaven is exactly what they covet. There the will of God is done constantly, cordially, completely, with the whole heart and soul. And nothing would transport them more, than to bring down to the globe which they traverse all the purity, spirituality, and energy, which reign in the realms of bliss; and carry into every relation of life, and exhibit in every undertaking and employment, the spirit and temper of an inhabitant of the celestial Zion. "Thy will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven. Let the whole world be filled with thy glory."

But though the law is exceeding broad, and there is much holiness in heaven; there is more in the heart of the Man Christ Jesus. He is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. He is his Elect, in whom his soul delighteth. But is Jesus too holy? Is his nature too pure, or his character too perfect and excellent to be an object of the love and imitation of his disciples? It is just what they most profoundly admire, and most eagerly long to resemble. Their ceaseless study and earnest prayer are to have the same mind in them which was in him, and to be in the world even as he was in the world. Their desires never can be gratified, nor their happiness complete, till they acquire his image, and shine out in a better world in all its lovely and glorious lustre. "As for me I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy like-

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ness. When he appears we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is."

If, therefore, amidst all your weaknesses and imperfections you are conscious that this is the case; that you hate every appearance of evil; that you are striving against sin; longing for deliverance from the body of death; solicitous for grace to glorify God in your body and spirit which are his, and to be holy even as he is holy: this is a demonstration that you are born from above, and created in Christ Jesus unto good works. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Genuine religion invariably appears,

IV. By a relish for spiritual enjoyments.

Jesus is rich in grace. He has much to bestow. He possesses unsearchable, inexpressible supplies of bliss: for he is heir of all things, and in him all fulness dwells. With the universe at his command, and all the resources of Deity at his disposal; he also holds in his hands the whole plenitude of the everlasting covenant, and all the treasures of redeeming mercy. In number, variety, and grandeur, they are every way worthy of the power and munificence of God; and calculated to raise the happy subjects who receive them to the height of dignity, and put them in possession of the most pure, perfect and enduring felicity. They require a whole Bible to reveal them, a whole heaven to contain them, and a whole eternity to unfold them. The Scriptures now are occupied in displaying the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. But after all, it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Eternity will be spent in accumulating fresh honour and blessedness on the heads of the redeemed: for they shall inherit all things, and be more and more assimilated in holiness and happiness to that Saviour whom they love, adore, and enjoy.

But infinitely great and ineffably glorious as they are; within the whole range of the everlasting gospel, is there

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a single blessing which a Christian can overlook, or undervalue? Is there a greater amount of light, love, and faithfulness in the Scriptures? are there more hopes, privileges, and consolations in the gospel? more vast and unbounded stores of delight and ecstacy in heaven? more beauty and brilliancy in the celestial crown? more stability and grandeur in the regions of unclouded light? greater kindness in the heart, or more large, precious, and diversified blessings in the hands of Immanuel, than a believer admires, and longs to possess? O give him his strongest and dearest desire, and he would instantly seize on the whole, and never rest till blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ, and filled with all the fulness of God.

As the merchant never apprehends that his trade can become too good nor his gains too great; as the husbandman never fears that the seasons shall prove too favourable nor his fields too productive; the Christian never dreads that his soul can possess too much prosperity, nor be too amply replenished and enriched with the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost. The more vast and invaluable supplies he receives from his blessed Lord, only lead him more to admire the sublime and indescribable delights that are still behind, and incite him to press more ardently after the unknown and yet uncommunicated fulness of Immanuel.

Now is this the case with you? Are you thirsting for God, the living God? Are you crying, When shall we come and appear before God? Do the benefits purchased by the blood of the adored Redeemer possess such a sacredness and value, that they stand too high in your esteem, and are far too dear to your heart, ever to be forgotten or disregarded? In reading the pages of inspiration, and in listening to the preaching of the gospel; does the mighty price which was paid to secure them, rivet your attention to every blessing presented to your notice, and instinctively call up a prayer for its possession? So far from despising or undervaluing one in all the vast assemblage, do you venerate and admire the whole, and long for the perfect enjoyment of them all? Does a love of

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spiritual blessings often lead you to the throne of grace; and when there, is it your constant supplication that he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will freely give you all things, make you complete in Christ, supply all your need according to his riches in glory, and cause you to increase with the increase of God?

If your conscience bear you witness in the Holy Ghost, that this really is your case: then no tongue can express your happiness. The lines have fallen to you in pleasant places: yea, ye have a goodly heritage. These desires and longings are not the product of nature. They never yet existed in a carnal and unrenewed heart. The men of the world mind earthly things, and have their portion here: and provided that they can secure the wealth and comforts of time, what care they for all the riches of redeeming mercy, and all the treasures of eternal glory? A love for religious enjoyments, and a relish for things divine, are the work of the Spirit, and mark their possessor an heir of heaven. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally-minded is death; but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." This love and this relish prove that ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit: for he that hath wrought you for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto you, in these holy desires and sacred longings, the earnest of the Spirit. And he is a rock: and his work is perfect. Having begun a good work in you, he will perform it unto the day of Christ.

Other evidences of a renovated nature might be easily multiplied. But the possession of those which have been already enumerated, are sufficient to dissipate all cause of alarm and dejection, to establish hope and peace in your hearts, and assure you that you are the objects of the love of God, and partakers of the high and invaluable blessings of the Gospel of his grace. Your religious progress may not be equal to your wishes. Your spiritual attainments may be far below what you are anxious to reach: and you may be harassed with many conflicts and

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trials, with much perplexity and fear, dejection and despondence. But still if your consciences bear you witness in the Holy Ghost, that you are resting for acceptance in the sight of God upon the righteousness of Christ alone, that Jesus is precious to your soul, that you are labouring to perfect holiness in the fear of God, and entertain a strong love and a growing liking for all that is pure and spiritual; you have reason to rejoice. The presence of such dispositions and principles is a complete and satisfactory demonstration that you are born from above, and on the high road to never-ending glory. Without the agency of the Eternal Spirit, they never could have found an entrance into your hearts.

In the absence of such evidences as those which have just now been stated, no hope can be entertained of your safety. For after the Bible so distinctly tells us, that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by him; and after it so plainly declares that if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away and all things are become new: it is the height of presumption and as much as your souls are worth, to cherish the expectation of heaven without trusting in Christ alone for righteousness and strength, and being constrained by his love to live, not to yourselves, but to him who died for you, and rose again. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid in his infinite and all-sufficient righteousness; and no man can have an interest in that righteousness who does not purify himself even as he is pure.

Self-righteousness and religious insensibility, legality and antinomianism are extremes alike unscriptural and dangerous. If we have not been shut up to the faith, and brought to cleave to Christ alone for justification on the one hand, and compelled on the other to shew our faith by our works, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness which are to the praise and glory of God: we are strangers to the first elements of Christianity. Our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins.

Sin is the disgrace of our nature, and the only source of

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our misery: and to hope for salvation whilst sin is retained, is as absurd as to expect health while we are employing measures to prolong our malady. Christ came to save us from our sins: so that along with the remission of iniquity, he also produces a renewal of our nature; and at the same time that he imparts a right, he likewise confers a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. The first discovery which we obtain of our initial salvation, is from our begun sanctification. Men may amuse themselves with whatever delusions they please: but if their faith is too feeble to subdue their sins, the awful day is not far distant when it will be found prodigiously too deficient in the strength requisite to save their souls. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And the faith that is incapable of producing the present visible effects, which the Scriptures invariably ascribe to it, how can it accomplish those that are future and unseen? If unable to plant the fear and love of God in the heart, and array the life in the beauties of holiness; how can it transport the soul to glory? If it fails amongst the smallest matters, with what safety can it be trusted in those of the most mighty and commanding interest? If on trial it gives way amidst the inferior things of earth and time, is it wise to rest on it for the infinite realities of heaven and eternity?

But if your religion has shewn you the vanity of these lying refuges: if it has led you to the Saviour; convinced you that in him alone you can be justified and glory; endeared him to your hearts, taught you to delight in his society and service, and to strive to magnify him in your body, whether it be by life, or by death: then your souls and all their interests are safe. You have fled to Jesus. And did he ever reject a soul that came to him? You are in Christ: and to them that are in him there is no condemnation. It was by such a faith as this that the saints in light found their way to the regions of everlasting rest: and if you abide in him, and cleave to him, your right to eternal life is as firm, and your souls as safe as those of the highest and happiest before the eternal throne.

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In the righteousness of Him whom you love there is infinite worth, enough for the free and full justification of "numbers without number;" and in his arm there is Almighty strength. Worlds unknown are upheld by his hand; and whilst it never grows weary, none of them are allowed to go wrong. Trusting to his righteousness, and protected by his power, what have you to fear? God is for you: and who can be against you. "To my sheep I give eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand: my Father who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Here then at last, my dear Christian brethren, I must leave you in the hands of the great Shepherd of the sheep. He is full of kindness and full of care. "A bruised reed will he not break, and the smoking flax will he not quench. Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him: therefore trust thou in him." He well deserves your trust: for with a power that is Almighty he possesses a faithfulness that never fails, and a compassion and kindness that know no bounds, and that never become weary. Search the Scriptures for clearer views of his character; and endeavour more and more to realize the freeness and all-sufficiency of his salvation. Live nearer to him, and labour to secure more and more of his fulness. In him all fulness dwells: and all things are yours. Take instant and complete possession of your inheritance, and maintain a spirit and temper corresponding to your high calling and bright and blessed prospects. The worst calamity that Satan can entail on any of the children of Adam, is to shut them out of the joys of heaven after death; and you cannot inflict a more grievous injury on your own souls during the days of your pilgrimage, than to exclude yourselves from the cheering hopes of the everlasting gospel, and the ineffable consolations of the Holy Ghost.

Give diligence then to make your calling and election sure. Hold the beginning of your confidence steadfast to the end; and building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the

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love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Weeping may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning. To you it shall be a morning without clouds, and in a land where the sun shall be no more your light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you by night, for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. There the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and your God your glory. And can men or angels express what such a portion includes?

THE END.

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CHRIST THE ONLY HOPE.

By various maxims, forms, and rules,
That pass for wisdom in the schools,
I strove my passion to restrain;
But all my efforts prov'd in vain.

But since the Saviour I have known,
My rules are all reduced to one:—
To keep my Lord, by faith, in view,
This strength supplies and motives too.

I see him lead a suff'ring life,
Patient amidst reproach and strife;
And from this pattern courage take
To bear and suffer for his sake.

Upon the cross I see him bleed,
And by the sight from fear am freed.
This sight destroys the life of sin,
And quickens heav'nly life within.

To look to Jesus as he rose,
Confirms my hope, disarms my foes.
The world I shame and overcome,
By pointing to my Saviour's tomb.

I see him look with pity down,
And hold in view the conq'ror's crown.
If pressed with griefs and cares before,
My soul revives, and asks no more

By faith I see the hour at hand,
When in his presence I shall stand.
Then it will be my endless bliss,
To see him where and as he is.

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THE PATH TO HEAVEN.

The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.
No traveller ever reach'd that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briers in his road.
* * * * * * * * *
But He, who knew what human hearts would prove,
How slow to learn the dictates of his love,
That, hard by nature and of stubborn will,
A life of ease would make them harder still;
In pity to the souls his grace design'd
To rescue from the ruins of mankind,
Call'd for a cloud to darken all their years,
And said, "Go, spend them in the vale of tears."
O balmy gales of soul-reviving air!
O salutary streams, that murmur there!
These flowing from the fount of grace above,
Those breathed from lips of everlasting love.
The flinty soil indeed their feet annoys!
Chill blasts of trouble nip their springing joys;
An envious world will interpose its frown,
To mar delights superior to its own;
And many a pang, experienced still within,
Reminds them of their hated inmate, sin;
But ills of every shape and every name,
Transform'd to blessings, miss their cruel aim;
And every moment's calm that soothes the breast
Is given in earnest of eternal rest.
Ah, be not sad, although your lot be cast
Far from the flock, and in a boundless waste!
No shepherd's tent within thy view appear,
But the chief Shepherd even there is near;
Thy tender sorrows and thy plaintive strain
Flow in a foreign land, but not in vain;
Thy tears all issue from a source divine,
And every drop bespeaks a Saviour thine.

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CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST.

Jesus! lover of my soul,
  Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the raging billows roll,—
  While the tempest still is high!
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
  Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
  O, receive my soul at last.

Other refuge have I none,—
  Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
  Still support and comfort me;
All my trust on thee is staid,
  All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
  With the shadow of thy wing.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
  All in all in thee I find!
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
  Heal the sick, and lead the blind:
Just and holy is thy name,
  I am all unrighteousness,
Vile and full of sin I am,
  Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with thee is found
  Grace to pardon all my sin—
Let the healing streams abound;
  Make and keep me pure within;
Thou of life the fountain art,
  Freely let me take of thee:
Spring thou up within my heart,
  Rise to all eternity.

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SAINTS' EMPLOY IN HEAVEN.

Exalted high at God's right hand,
Nearer the throne than cherubs stand;
With glory crown'd, in white array,
My wond'ring soul says, "Who are they?"

These are the saints, belov'd of God—
Wash'd are their robes in Jesus' blood;
More spotless than the purest white,
They shine in uncreated light.

Brighter than angels, lo, they shine,
Their glories great, and all divine;
Tell me their origin, and say
Their order what, and whence came they?

Thro' tribulation great they came,
They bore the cross, and scorn'd the shame
Within the living temple blest
In God they dwell, and on him rest.

Unknown to mortal ears they sing
The sacred glories of their king;
Tell me the subject of their lays,
And whence their loud exalted praise?

Jesus, the Saviour, is their theme;
They sing the wonders of his name;
To him ascribing pow'r and grace,
Dominion and eternal praise.

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